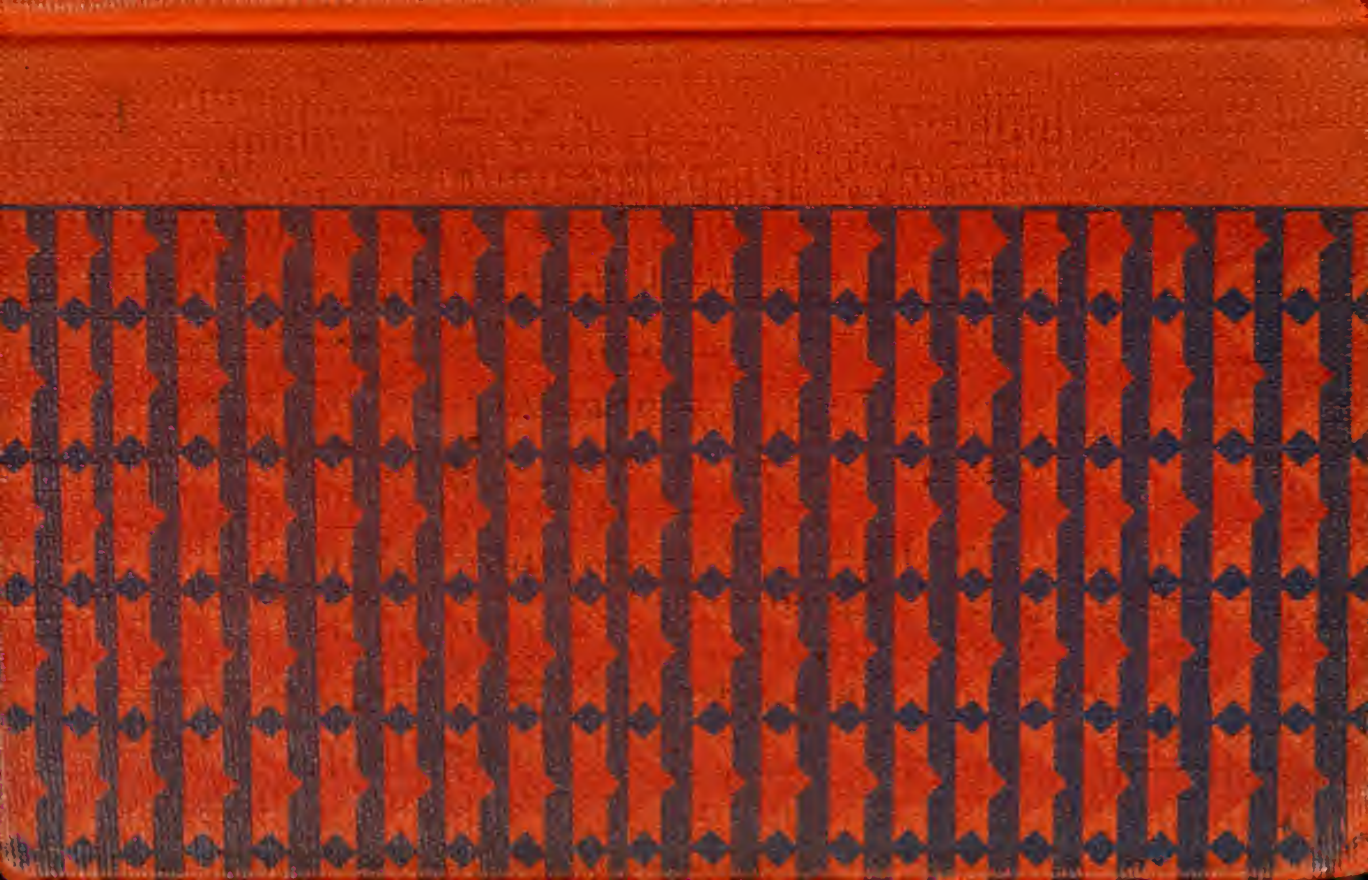


822 Symonds
Naked truth
BNG

NY PUBLIC LIBRARY THE BRANCH LIBRARIES
3 3333 05810 5699

Drama MY

Please return this book promptly and keep it in good condition for the next borrower *Remember* ——
*YOU* WILL BE THE NEXT BORROWER OF SOME OTHER BOOK!

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sep 22 53 | | | |
| OCT 19 '53 | | DyMIX 798111 | |
| OCT 20 53 | | | |
| Nov 23 53 | | | |
| MAR 9 '54 | | | |
| | | | |
| JAN 3 55 | | | |
| Oct 15 '57 | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
CIRCULATION DEPARTMENT

THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
AT
LINCOLN CENTER
111 Amsterdam Avenue
New York, N. Y. 10023

MY

Books circulate for four weeks (28 days) unless stamped otherwise.
No renewals are allowed.

A fine will be charged for each overdue book at the rate of 10 cents per calendar day for adult books and 5 cents per calendar day for children's books.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/nakedtruthfarcic00symo

## *ONE ACT PLAYS BY GERTRUDE JENNINGS.*

Published at one shilling net each by SAMUEL FRENCH, Limited

---

*ACID DROPS. One male, six female characters.*

*ALLOTMENTS. Two female characters, both of which can be impersonated by men if desired.*

*AT THE RIBBON COUNTER. Three female characters.*

*THE BATHROOM DOOR. Three male, three female characters.*

*BETWEEN THE SOUP AND THE SAVOURY. Three female characters.*

*BOBBIE SETTLES DOWN. One male, three female characters.*

*ELEGANT EDWARD. Four male, one female characters.*

*FIVE BIRDS IN A CAGE. Three male, two female characters.*

*NO SERVANTS. One male, five female characters.*

*"I'M SORRY—IT'S OUT!" Seven female characters.*

*IN THE CELLAR. Three male, three female characters.*

*POACHED EGGS AND PEARLS. Three male, six female characters.*

*THE REST CURE. One male, four female characters.*

*THE NEW POOR. One male, four female characters.*

*WAITING FOR THE 'BUS. Two male, ten female characters.*

---

*FOUR ONE ACT PLAYS BY GERTRUDE JENNINGS. In one volume containing "The Rest Cure," "Between the Soup and the Savoury," "The Pros and Cons," and "Acid Drops." Two Shillings and Sixpence net.*

# THE NAKED TRUTH

05810 5699

A FARCICAL COMEDY IN
THREE ACTS

My

By

GEORGE PASTON and W. B. MAXWELL

COPYRIGHT, 1910, BY SAMUEL FRENCH, LTD

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

CAUTION.—Professionals and Amateurs are hereby warned that THE NAKED TRUTH, being fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States, is subject to royalty, and anyone presenting the play without the consent of the owner or his authorized agents will be liable to the penalties by law provided. Application for professional and amateur rights must be made to Samuel French, 28-30 West 38th Street, New York.

LONDON
SAMUEL FRENCH, LTD.
PUBLISHERS
26 SOUTHAMPTON STREET
STRAND, W.C.2

NEW YORK
SAMUEL FRENCH
PUBLISHER
28 WEST 38TH STREET

Any wigs or make-up articles used in the performance of "The Naked Truth" may be hired or purchased reasonably from Messrs. C. H. Fox, Ltd., 27 Wellington Street, Strand, London.

# THE NAKED TRUTH

## ACT I.

SCENE.—*The Drawing-room of the* DARRELLS' *house at Hampstead.*

## ACT II.

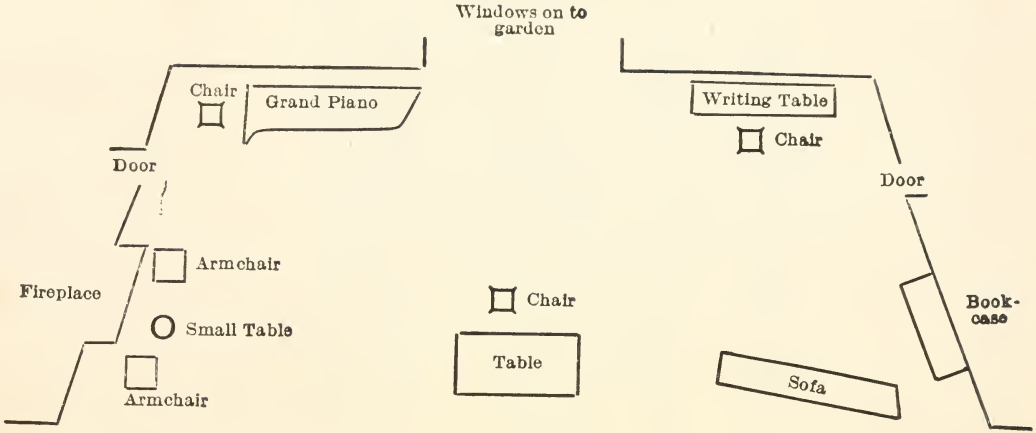
SCENE.—*At the Board Room of the Syrian Cement Company in Queen Victoria Street.*

## ACT III.

SCENE.—*In the Garden of the* DARRELLS' *house.*

There is an interval of one day between Acts I. and II., and an interval of one day between Acts II. and III.

GIFT COPY


Windows on to garden
Chair
Grand Piano
Door
Fireplace
Armchair
Small Table
Armchair
Chair
Table
Writing Table
Chair
Door
Book-case
Sofa

# THE NAKED TRUTH

## ACT I.

SCENE.—*Drawing-room of a house in Wisteria Road, N.W. A large window at back, opening to verandah or terrace. Door* R. *leading to hall. Another door* L. *Fireplace below this door, and a small armchair on each side of the hearth. A piano above the door. A table* C. *and a sofa* L.

*It is a July afternoon.*

(MRS. DARRELL, *a well-preserved woman of* 59, *is writing at the table. Presently she rises and rings the bell* R. *and returns to the table.*)

(HAMMOND *comes in door* R. *She is a tall, upright, very respectable-looking parlour-maid of* 48. *She has the appearance of a confidential servant, who has been a long time in the family. Her hair is turning grey and she wears spectacles.*)

MRS. DARRELL. (*seated at table* C.) Hammond, have you lit the fire in Mr. Darrell's room?

HAMMOND. (R.C.) Yes, m'm. There's a roaring fire.

Mrs. Hayter. Oh, I'm sure you have *everything* to hope . . . and the girl herself?—you've said nothing of her! (*effusively*) You *love* her?—she's what you would have *chosen*?

Mrs. Darrell. Oh, she's a nice little thing! I don't know that I should have chosen her if I'd been a man. But she'll suit Bunny very well. He's not discriminating about women, you know.

Mrs. Hayter. (*surprised*) Not?

Mrs. Darrell. No—nor they about him.

(*Bell.*)

Mrs. Darrell. (r. *of table, rises*) That must be Norah and her friend, Madame Favre. She has been rushing about to those dreadful sales.

Mrs. Hayter. I'm simply *dying* to see Bunny's *fiancée*! (*crosses* l. *and sit sofa*)

Mrs. Darrell. Yes, I thought you would be.

(*Enter* Norah Creighton *and* Rosalie Favre).

(Madame Favre 1*st to fireplace and put parasol on table at fireplace.* Norah *to* Mrs. Darrell.)

(Norah *is a pretty little girl of about* 20, *simply dressed, except for her large hat.* Rosalie *is a few years older, and is dressed like a young married woman.*)

Mrs. Darrell. (*to* Norah *who crosses to* Mrs. Hayter *above table*) How late you are, dear! And how hot you must be! Norah, this is an old friend of Bunny's—Mrs. Hayter. Miss Creighton.

MRS. HAYTER. (*very sweetly, taking* NORAH'S *hand*) I have know dear Bunny so many years. (NORAH *to back of sofa*)

MRS. DARRELL. Madame Favre.

MRS. DARRELL (C.), MADAME FAVRE (R. *of her bow then crosses to* L.C.)

MRS. HAYTER. You won't mind my saying that I think you're a *very* lucky girl!

ROSALIE. (L.C.) The luck is not all on one side, for I think M. Bunny is the more lucky.

NORAH. (*to* MRS. HAYTER, L.) I wonder I've never heard him talk of you?

MRS. HAYTER. (*smiling*) I expect you'd something *much* better to talk about. You must let us see a *great* deal of you when you're married.

NORAH. Thank you. But we're only just engaged, you know—we may have to wait years and years.

ROSALIE. But the uncle from India! Will he not be what you call an "all right?" Well, of course he will!

MRS. HAYTER. I'm sure he will when he sees Bunny.

MRS. DARRELL. One can't help hoping.

(NORAH *and* ROSALIE *go up to window and* ROSALIE *steps out through French window.* NORAH *goes back to sofa.*)

(*Enter* HAMMOND, *ushering in* CAPTAIN LESTRANGE.)

HAMMOND. Mr. Lestrange. (*goes out*)

Lestrange. (*to* R. *of table* C.) (*A fair young man with a single eyeglass. To* Mrs. Darrell) How d'ye do? I've come to see Bunny. Er—that is—I've come to see you too, of course, but I particularly wanted to see Bunny.

Mrs. Darrell. To congratulate him, of course. How nice of you! You know Mrs. Hayter—Miss Creighton. (*looks round*)

Lestrange. Yes—wanted to congratulate him and all that, but I also wanted to talk to him about a little matter of business.

Mrs. Hayter. Fancy any one wanting to talk to Bunny about business!

Norah. But he's on the Stock Exchange.

Lestrange. (*in explanatory tone*) Fact is, I'm dead sick of the Turf, I've had such rotten bad luck lately, so I thought I'd have a flutter in the City for a change.

Mrs. Hayter. Out of the frying-pan!

Lestrange. Oh! I don't know. A lot of silly asses seem to make money on the Stock Exchange, so I wanted old Bunny to give me a tip.

Mrs. Darrell. I've no doubt he'll give you the best advice he can. (*naïvely*) But stocks and shares have a way of doing just what you don't expect—even when you're a stockbroker. (*She goes to the tea-table and sits*)

(*Enter* Rosalie *from the balcony and goes* L.C.)

Rosalie. (*entering from window to* L. *of table* C.)

Ah, what a charming surprise! Why, it's M. Lestrange! (Lestrange *crosses over to* Rosalie) Do you know, Mesdames, M. Lestrange and I are what you say old friends—my poor husband, who now rests in Père la Chaise, and I met him at Monte Carlo, and Monsieur he promise to show me London, when I came here. It is true, is it not?

Lestrange. Quite true, Madame. To-morrow's a free day at the National Gallery. We might go there. I can't fancy old Bunny engaged to be married.

Mrs. Darrell. Can't you? There's the future Mrs. Bunny.

Lestrange. (*blankly, looking across at the two girls*) Not Madame Favre!

Rosalie. Mais non. Ma foi! jamais de la vie.

Mrs. Darrell. No—Miss Creighton.

Lestrange. (*cheerfully*) Oh, congratulations! Bunny's a good old sort. One of the best, what!

Mrs. Hayter. (*sweetly*) Such *charming* manners!

Rosalie. Et puis, il est si beau garçon.

Mrs. Darrell. Yes, he's very popular with most people.

Norah. (*thoughtfully. Crosses* R C. *with* Rosalie) A girl said the other day she felt like a cat being stroked the right way when Bunny talked to her. I sometimes wonder—— (*pauses*)

(Lestrange *takes cup from* Mrs. Hayter *and puts it on table.*)

Mrs. Hayter. (*watching her*) What?

Norah. It's a delightful sensation of course! But even a cat gets tired of being stroked—and walks away. (*sit chair up* R.)

(Rosalie *sit chair down* R.)

Mrs. Hayter. Oh, you never know where you are with cats.

Mrs. Darrell. No, I've noticed that.

(*Enter* Bunny *quickly door* L. *He has a radiant smile, an effusive manner, and an air of exuberant charm and geniality.*)

(Lestrange *takes tea to girls* R. *after* Bunny's *entrance.*)

Mrs. Darrell. Ah! here's Bunny.

Bunny. (*crossing to* Mrs. Hayter, *with outstretched hand*) Now this *is* kind!—I call this really friendly. You've come to wish me joy, I know. One of the very first.

Mrs. Hayter. (*with a certain effort*) Yes, of course—one of the very first. But I'm a little hurt, you know. Fancy your keeping such an old friend in the dark!

Bunny. (*hastily*) Dearest lady, I didn't know it myself till the night before last. I hardly realize it even yet. Norah has been keeping me on tenter-hooks. Haven't you, darling? (*to table* C.)

Norah. (*simply*) Not that I know of. I said yes at once.

Bunny. (*effusively*) I want you two to be the very greatest friends.

Mrs. Hayter. Miss Creighton says you've never spoken of me.

Bunny. No, one keeps one's best friends, like one's best wine—to the last. Ah! Madame Favre, how do you do? Well, Teddy, come to wish me joy, eh? (*crosses to* R.C.)

Madame Favre. Bonjour, Monsieur.

Mrs. Darrell. Mr. Lestrange is combining business with pleasure.

Lestrange. (R. *of tea table*) Yes, I was saying I want to have a flutter in the City to make up for a rotten bad Ascot. If you could give me a tip or two——

Bunny. (*with a deprecating laugh*) You'll have to come to the office and talk it over there.

Lestrange. I only just want you to show me the ropes—options, contangoes and things—I'll soon pick up the game.

Bunny. (*pretending to be impressed. To* Mrs. Hayter) If you clever racing men come to the City, we stock-brokers shan't have a look in! (*crosses* L.)

Lestrange. (*modestly*) Oh, I don't know. . . . Of course, I've only got about twopence halfpenny to play with, but I thought if I could turn it into fivepence——

Mrs. Hayter. Or a penny farthing——

Bunny. (*smiling at her*) Don't be pessimistic!

(*he takes her cup and puts it on table*) (*to* Lestrange) We're bringing out a new issue of the S.C.C.—that ought to pay ten to fifteen per cent.

Lestrange. That's no good to me. I want to buy something that's going up to-morrow, sell at the end of the week, and touch a little ready within the fortnight.

Bunny. You don't want much, do you?

Rosalie. Oh, but tell me—what is the S.C.C.? Is it something to do with Le Sport?

Bunny. No, no, Madame Favre, it is the "Syrian Cement Company." Mr. Hayter is the distinguished Chairman, and I am the humble, but hard-working, secretary. (*crosses* r. *to fireplace*)

Mrs. Hayter. My husband is awfully keen on it—he says it's the romance of business.

Bunny. (*brightly*) So it is. Romance is the very word. (*standing on the hearthrug and beaming round upon the company*) So jolly your all rallying round me to-day! I've got an ordeal in front of me.

Mrs. Hayter. The Indian uncle?

Bunny. (*at fireplace*) Yes. I can just remember him as a crusty old bachelor thirty years ago. I'm told that I was really a *sweet* child—but he always alluded to me as "that spoilt brat," and got me chivvied off to the nursery.

Mrs. Darrell. He didn't understand children.

Bunny. Now I suppose he's a typical old Nabob, who'll bore us to death with his yarns about tiger-shooting and pig-sticking.

Norah. Poor old man! Perhaps he's looking forward to coming home and seeing you all again. He must have been lonely out there.

Bunny. (*patting her hand*) Anyway, we'll be very sweet to the old bore. (*takes cup from* Norah *and puts it on mantelpiece.*)

Lestrange. Well, I must be trottin' along.

Bunny. No, wait and see the tame Rajah. He may take a fancy to you. (*to* Lestrange, R.C.)

Lestrange. I don't want to cut you out, dear old boy. . . . Look you up in the morning—Dodd & Gardiner, eh?

Bunny. No, you'll have to come to the office of the Syrian Cement Company. There's a Board meeting. 301A, Queen Victoria Street.

Lestrange. How on earth shall I find it?

Bunny. Do you know the Mansion House when you see it?

Lestrange. The Mansion House!

Bunny. Yes, the Mansion House. Where they keep the Mayor.

Lestrange.—Oh! the *Mansion* House.

Bunny. Yes, the Mansion House. Well, it's just round the corner, 301A, Queen Victoria Street.

Lestrange. (*to* Rosalie *down* R.) Now, madame, here's a chance for you. You said you wanted to come down and see the City, will you let me escort you?

Rosalie. Oh, mais oui! I come, of course! What an adventure! The City! The City of Lon-

don. Yes, I will love to see it! Will you really take me?

Lestrange. It's a bargain! Then I'll call for you in the morning. *Au revoir!* I wonder what I ought to wear for the City?

Bunny. Clothes, dear old boy! Clothes.

Lestrange. I sometimes think you're laughing at me. (*exit*)

Bunny. They're quite civilized in the City, you know. (*follows* Lestrange *to door then to* L. *behind table* C.)

(*Enter* Hammond *door* L.)

Hammond. (*to* Norah) Mrs. Pinner has brought Miss Norah's dress home, m'm.

Norah. (*to* Mrs. Darrell, *rise*) It's my new evening frock, with the lace flounce you gave me.

Mrs. Darrell. Oh, yes. Ask her to wait till I can see her.

(*Exit* Hammond, L.)

Norah. You come too, Rosalie. You understand lace, don't you?

(*They both go to door* L. *above table.*)

Rosalie. Do I understand lace? What do you think? Mais c'est moi qui vous dit Dentelles de Brusselles de Malines de Venise.

(*Exeunt* Norah *and* Rosalie.)

MRS. HAYTER. Well, I must tear myself away (*rises, and crosses to front of table* C.)

MRS. DARRELL. No, please don't; stop and have a chat with Bunny.

(BUNNY *makes sign to* MRS. DARRELL *behind* MRS. HAYTER'S *back.*)

BUNNY. Yes, don't leave me alone. The Nabob may arrive at any moment.

MRS. DARRELL. Now I'll explain the new sleeve to Mrs. Pinner.

(*Exit* L.)

MRS. HAYTER. (*crosses to fireplace*) Well, what have you got to say for yourself? (*she speaks with forced lightness, but there is a ring of genuine anger and wounded feeling in her voice*)

BUNNY. (C. *Obviously uneasy, but trying to disguise it*) I always have plenty to say for myself.

MRS. HAYTER. You needn't tell *me* that. . . . (*changing to reproachful tone*) Do you think it was fair—do you think it was really friendly—to treat me like this?—to—to——

BUNNY. If you knew—— (R.C.)

MRS. HAYTER. . . . to give me no hint—not even in a letter, to let me see the announcement first in the papers?——

BUNNY. Don't blame me till you hear the truth!

MRS. HAYTER. The truth! From *you!!* I suppose you were afraid I should make a scene?

Bunny. No—no——

Mrs. Hayter. Yet you knew I only wanted your happiness. I've *urged* you to marry. But you always scoffed at the idea—said you hated girls.

Bunny. I know—I know.

Mrs. Hayter. (*with a suggestion of tears in her voice*) You might have trusted your secret to *me* —of all people——

Bunny. (*obviously feeling that drastic measures must be taken to avoid a worse scene*) I know—it must have seemed strange—almost unaccountable. But I'll tell you *exactly* how it happened. (*crosses to her*) You know my mother has been bothering me to marry for years. She's always asking girls to stay—"really nice girls" she calls them. Well, I've held my own against the really nice girls all these years . . . you can guess the talisman that protected me.

Mrs. Hayter. The talisman!

Bunny. (*dropping his voice*) My friendship with you . . . But you went to Dinard, and I was so lonely. I used to walk up and down outside your house, and look up at the darkened windows.

Mrs. Hayter. (*moved*) Did you?

Bunny. Then the nice girl came—a nicer one than usual. My mother left us alone together—sent us out together. At last she gave me to understand what was expected of me. (to L.) Well— (*with a gesture*)—I did my duty.

Mrs. Hayter. Your duty!

Bunny. (*to* R.) It was rushed into the *Morning Post* almost before I knew where I was. I hadn't heard you were back, but I had written to you—a long, long letter—eight pages.

Mrs. Hayter. I should like to see it.

Bunny. I tore it up. I felt I must see you—talk it all over with you—one of our dear old talks—you remember?

Mrs. Hayter. (*with a touch of bitterness*) Oh, yes, I remember— (*sit armchair down* R.) She's not a bad-looking little thing, but I don't see why you should have been forced into this?—unless you're really fond of her?

Bunny. I'm fond of her in a way. If I must marry and settle down, I don't suppose I could do better.

Mrs. Hayter. (*softly*) But love——?

Bunny. (*looking at her*) Love is a big word! One can only love one woman at a time. (*dropping his voice*) My fate was sealed three years ago.

Mrs. Hayter. Three years! You mean——?

Bunny. (*with a great appearance of sincerity and candour*) I never told you in so many words before, but you must have *known*——

Mrs. Hayter. (*murmurs*) Known?

Bunny. Yes; though my devotion was humble, silent, dog-like, you *must* have known. It was enough for me to sit at your feet, to hold your hand in mine, to listen to your troubles, and try to console you in my feeble way. (*very simply*) I'm like that,

you know. I dare say it's silly, but I always want to give everything and take nothing. . . . When I heard you say that our friendship made your sad life a little less lonely, I had my reward.

MRS. HAYTER. You felt all that, and yet you—— (*rise and to him and cross* C., *with artistic emotion*) Yes, it's true my life is sad—it's true I'm lonely (*turns to* BUNNY) my husband——

(BUNNY *makes gesture of commiseration.*)

You know what he is?—kind enough—more than generous—but what of that when we haven't an idea in common?—when he grates on my nerves with every word (*from him*) and every gesture?

BUNNY. (*sympathetically*) I know! I *know!*

MRS. HAYTER (*a little* L., *revelling in self-pity*) What have I got out of it all? A big empty house, a round of wearisome gaiety, heaps of indifferent acquaintances. (*turn to him and stretch out her hand*) I had just *one* friend— (BUNNY *taking her hand, reproachfully. Had?*—Melisande!—Had??) —one who could understand and feel for me—— But he's lost to me now. (*turn away* L.)

BUNNY. Lost to you! Never. How little you know me! Why, our friendship is the greatest treasure of my life. You'll never know what it's done for me. I'm a different man—a better man for having known you.

MRS. HAYTER. I should like to think I had helped you.

BUNNY. I hate talking about myself—but till I

met you, I was like other young men—careless, selfish, cynical. Since I've known you, the thought of you—the image of your pale, sad face—has come between me and—er (*from her* R.C.)—temptation.

Mrs. Hayter. (*immensely flattered*) I'm glad you've told me that.

Bunny. And why should anything be changed? Norah is a dear, sweet girl, but no companion for a man like me. We can still have our long talks—our walks—and drives. Don't deprive me of your friendship?—the most precious thing in the whole world to me—now and ever. (*to her and take both her hands.*)

Mrs. Hayter. (*who by this time is quite soothed and cheered*) Hush! you mustn't talk like that! Not here—not now. I must see you alone—to-morrow.

Mrs. Darrell. (*outside*) Come along, Norah——

(Bunny *crosses* R.)

(*Enter* Mrs. Darrell *and* Norah, L. *and to* L.C.)

Mrs. Darrell. (*to* L.C. *front of table* C.) It's the greatest success! It hardly wants any alteration!

Mrs. Hayter. (*to* Mrs. Darrell, L.C.) How wonderful! My things have to go back over and over again before they can be got *really* right. Good bye, Mrs. Darrell. (*shakes hands with* Mrs. Darrell *and* Norah.)

BUNNY. But then you have such a reputation to dress up to. You're not going?

MRS. HAYTER. No, I can't stop and see the old uncle. We're dining early—for the new French play. (*crosses to door* R.)

BUNNY. That is cruel of you. But if you will tear yourself away——

(*Exit* MRS. HAYTER, *escorted by* BUNNY.)

MRS. DARRELL. (*sits on sofa*) Well, how many bargains did you pick up?

NORAH. Oh! heaps. (*goes* R.) This hat—had been three guineas—reduced to twenty-five and sixpence. A crêpe de chine blouse—had been thirty-five and ninepence—reduced to eighteen and elevenpence. Six pairs of long white gloves—had been five and elevenpence—reduced to——

(BUNNY *enters and goes* C. *at back of table.* MRS. DARRELL *goes up to writing table.*)

(*Enter* BUNNY.)

BUNNY. (R.C. *fanning himself with his handkerchief*) Thank goodness *that's* over! I thought she was never going.

NORAH. (R. *surprised*) Why, Bunny, I thought she was such a friend of yours. And you begged her to stay.

BUNNY. One must be civil.

NORAH. (*puzzled*) But you like her, don't you?

BUNNY. Oh, yes—when she's sensible. . . .

Don't you ever develop nerves, child; or think you're misunderstood.

NORAH. (R.C.) Does *she* think she's misunderstood? But she's got a husband.

BUNNY. (C.) Yes, and not at all a bad old sort either!

NORAH. (*thoughtfully*) She was very sweet to me, but I don't think she *really liked* me.

BUNNY. (*looking at her with a smile*) No, there are exactly fifteen reasons why she wouldn't.

NORAH. What reasons?

BUNNY. She'd never forgive you for being twenty when she's thirty-five.

NORAH. Poor thing! It must be dreadful to be so old.

(*Ring at front door*)

BUNNY. There's the Nabob. Prepare to receive cavalry. (*crosses* L.)

MRS. DARRELL. Shut the window, Bunny. (BUNNY *goes up to window*) I wonder if we ought to have had a fire? (*to* R. *of table*)

(*Enter* HAMMOND R.)

HAMMOND. (*in evident excitement*) Mr. James Darrell.

(*Enter* JAMES DARRELL. *He is a big stout man, with a good deal of colour. He appears to feel the heat. His manner is blunt and abrupt, but not unkindly.*

*There is an air of shrewdness and self-reliance about him.*)

Darrell. (*to* Mrs. Darrell, *front of table* C.) Ah! my dear Lydia. How are you? Let me have a look at you. Upon my soul, I should hardly have known you. But we none of us grow younger, eh?

(Mrs. Darrell *winces.*)

Bunny. Welcome home, Uncle James. (*down* L.C.)

Darrell. How d'ye do? You're Bunny, I suppose. Phew! You keep your room awfully hot, let me tell you.

Mrs. Darrell. (*feebly*) You're looking very well, James—much better than I expected.

Darrell. Expected a wreck, eh? No, there's not much the matter with me, but I find your English summer very trying. Could we have the window open? It's like a Turkish bath in here.

(Bunny *goes up and opens French window.*)

Mrs. Darrell. James, I want to introduce you to a new niece. (*brings forward* Norah)

Darrell. How do you do, my dear? (*to* Norah R.) Whose daughter are you? Not Emily's?

Bunny. No—Miss Creighton has promised to be my wife. (*to* L. *of table* C.)

Darrell. I see? Most interesting! A pleasant surprise, eh? I thought you were a confirmed

old bachelor, Bunny? You're getting on, aren't you? Let's see, you must be——

Bunny. (*buoyantly, with the evident intention of putting a stop to the discussion of his age*) Yes, getting on, I hope, Uncle James. Growing in grace—year by year——

Darrell. Well, I congratulate you, young fellow. When's the happy day?

Bunny. Oh! not yet awhile, uncle, I'm afraid. Business has been so slack lately.

Mrs. Darrell. There seems no chance of it this year. But I should so like to see him settled. (*crosses to* Norah R. *and they go to fireplace*)

Darrell. (*with a grunt*) H'm. . . . Do you often have it as hot as this? (*crosses to* C.) It's simply stifling.

Mrs. Darrell. Oh, James, and we all thought you'd be so chilly. I ordered a fire in your room, (Darrell. A what!!) and hot bottles in your bed.

Darrell. Hot bottles in my bed in the middle of summer! Good gracious me! But you didn't expect me to stop here, did you?

Mrs. Darrell. Why, yes.

Bunny. Of *course* we did—we've been looking forward for months to having you with us, and making you feel at home.

Darrell. That's very kind of you, I'm sure. But at my age a man feels more at home in hotels than in other people's houses. My pals have recommended

me a little private hotel where they cater specially for old Indians——

Bunny. Where's that, uncle?

Darrell. In Jermyn Street—a place called Shubert's.

Bunny. (*regretfully*) Oh! uncle. So far away!

(*Crosses to* Mrs. Darrell R.C.)

Darrell. (R.C.) None of your stuffy carpets and curtains, but polished floors and nice clean matting. Open windows and plenty of ice. You don't seem able to tackle your hot weather—when you get it—any better than your snowfalls.

Bunny. (*engagingly*) Do you know, I remember you quite well, Uncle James, when you went away, although I was only a little mite at the time.

Darrell. Yes, and I remember *you*. Always said you wanted smacking. (*crosses* L. *front of sofa*)

Bunny. (C.) Ah, that's only your little joke, Uncle James. You were so awfully kind to me. You used to tell me such beautiful stories about giants, and—and dragons.

Darrell. (*brusquely*) What are you talking about! I never remember telling stories to a child in my life! For the very good reason that I never knew any to tell.

Bunny. (*earnestly*) Oh, but you *did*, uncle. . . And you used to give me sweets too. I've got a little box still that you gave me full of chocolates.

DARRELL. I never gave a child sweets in my life. I always said they were unwholesome trash!

BUNNY. Oh, but you *did*, uncle. I can show you the box now. It's a little pink box with a beautiful lady on the lid. It's faded and worn and dirty now, but I never could bear to throw it away. (*very simply*) I'm like that, you know. If people are kind to me, I never forget it. Mother, didn't I say (L. *of* C. *table*) if ever I grew up to be a man I hoped I should be like Uncle James!

MRS. DARRELL. I forget.

DARRELL. (*looking at* BUNNY) H'm!

BUNNY. We're so looking forward to your stories about India, Uncle James. Aren't we, mother? Aren't we, Norah?

NORAH. (*shyly*) *I* should like to hear them.

MRS. DARRELL. You must have had so many interesting experiences.

BUNNY. Tiger shooting—pig sticking—mem-sahibs, er——

DARRELL. What are you talking about, sir? I never shot a tiger or stuck a pig in my life. I'd no time for such rubbish. Ever since I took charge of our Calcutta House, my nose has been kept pretty close to the grindstone. If I were to write my reminiscences, they'd be contained in one word—R-i-c-e—*Rice!*

BUNNY. (*admiringly*) Oh, Uncle James, how epigrammatic!

Darrell. Yes, I'*ve* been dealing in rice. But I see what *you* deal in, young man—compliments.

Bunny. Oh, *no*, uncle—I say just what comes into my head. I know it's silly, but I can't help it.

Darrell. Now, suppose you give me an account of yourself. You're a stockbroker, ain't you?

Bunny. (*to* Darrell *a little*) I'm not a member of the Stock Exchange. I do a half commission with Dodd & Gardiner.

Darrell. H'm! How do you manage to do this company work? Doesn't your firm object?

Bunny. Oh no, Dodd & Gardiner are the official brokers to the Company.

Darrell. Well now, as to this famous company——

Bunny. The Syrian Cement Company?

Darrell. Yes. I put some money into it on Hayter's advice. Not that he knows much about business, I imagine. In fact, I don't think he knows anything about business at all, though I must say he has a keen eye for a curio. But why you should want me on the Board——

Bunny. We think it an honour and a privilege.

Darrell. But I don't know anything about the concern. What *is* this Syrian Cement?

Bunny. It's the most wonderful stuff, uncle. It was discovered, or rather re-discovered by a Greek engineer. We have every reason for believing that it was originally used in the construction of the Pyramids.

Darrell. The Pyramids! You don't say so!! Now I see why Hayter was so keen on it. Where's your plant?

Bunny. On the coast of Syria. (*enthusiastically*) We have a big order from the Egyptian Government, for the Nile Irrigation Works. You're on *velvet*, Uncle James.

Darrell. Upon my soul! But I like to look into these things for myself.

Bunny. Come down to the office before the Board Meeting to-morrow, and I'll go through the papers with you and explain everything.

Darrell. Good! Let me have plenty of facts and figures, and I can dispense with sugar-plums and compliments. (*to* Mrs. Darrell *and* Norah) Forgive me for talking shop to young Hopeful! (*crosses* R.C. *to* Mrs. Darrell)

Mrs. Darrell. We're all interested in Syrian Cement. Aren't we, Norah!

Norah. Yes. I've got five pounds in it.

Darrell. Five pounds!—you don't say so. By the way I brought home a few little bits of trumpery from the bazaars in India. (*to* Bunny) I left the bag in the hall! (*crosses* L.) so if you'd be good enough to fetch it.

Bunny. How *generous* of you, uncle! We never expected uncle to bring us anything did we, mother?

(*Crosses* R. *and exit.*)

Mrs. Darrell. It's too kind of you. (*to* C.)

Darrell. (*looking at his watch*) Hullo! I shall be late for dinner if I don't look sharp. (C.)

Mrs. Darrell. But surely you'll dine with *us*, James! We've made every preparation—Mulligatawny soup, curried mutton, anchovy toast——

Darrell. I never eat that sort of thing! In any case, I'm going to dine with an old pal of mine called Tugwell, and at Shubert's they give you what you dream of in India, and can't get—juicy chops and tender steaks—lots of fresh vegetables, plum puddings, and apple-tarts and Devonshire cream. Ha! I'm going to enjoy myself to-night—and so is old Tugwell! (*crosses* L.)

(*Enter* Bunny, R. *carrying a well-worn leather valise, which he puts on sofa* L.)

Mrs. Darrell. Bunny, your uncle can't even dine with us.

Bunny. Oh, Uncle James, *what* a disappointment!

Darrell. (*unlocking valise*) I'll tell you what I will do, if you will allow me. I'll drop in for lunch on Sunday. But no curry, mind. If I may suggest, cold boiled beef and a salad. That's a lunch fit for a king.

Mrs. Darrell. (*meekly*) Just as you like, James.

Darrell. (*opening box and beginning to take things out*) This is only rubbish, you know—mostly made in Birmingham. But people at home seem to expect

——(*hands shawl to* Mrs. Darrell) Is that any use to you ?

(Mrs. Darrell *and* Norah *cross to* L.C. *by sofa.*)

Bunny. Oh ! Uncle James !

Mrs. Darrell. Oh, James, but it's too lovely ! What wonderful colouring.

(Mrs. Darrell *puts shawl on chair* C.)

Darrell. Yes, they do these things rather well in Birmingham. The natives are getting quite a taste for aniline dyes ! (*takes out necklet and bangles, and hands them to* Norah) If you would care to accept these, young lady ?

Bunny. Oh ! Uncle James !

Norah. Oh, *thank* you ! May I really have them ? I've got nothing half so pretty !

Darrell. (*handing out things to* Mrs. Darrell) Lacquer trays and a couple of fans. And some scraps of embroidery that may come in for sofa cushions.

Bunny. Oh, mother ! Aren't you in luck ?

Mrs. Darrell. Really, we shall feel like Begums. (*crosses* R. *back of table* C.)

Bunny. (*leans over back of sofa, and picks up a ring*) What a curious old ring. (*front of sofa*)

Darrell. Oh, that silver thing ! It's ugly enough in all conscience, but the owner said it was a sacred ring. Pretended it had some wonderful history. (C.)

Norah. (*interested*) What was the history? (R. *of* Bunny.)

Darrell. To tell you the truth, I never inquired. I'd no time to waste on native yarns. (*crosses* R.C.)

Bunny. But we mustn't take all your valuable things.

Darrell. There's nothing valuable about it, I picked it up for a few pice.

Bunny. There's an inscription on it.

Darrell. I can't read it. That's what they call the Bhutan dialect.

Bunny. There's some design engraved upon it.

Darrell. Oh, that's a tongue.

Bunny. A tongue?

Darrell. Yes, sir—a tongue! The symbol of Onagra. (Mrs. Darrell *sits in chair below fireplace*)

Bunny. Onagra? Who was he?

Darrell. *She*—she was a goddess. Some say, the goddess of truth—some say of courage. She's worshipped by an obscure Bhutan tribe. They are supposed to be under a vow to speak the truth—at least to each other. . . . I believe the tribe is practically extinct. Anyhow, I never met any of 'em! For I found the natives all liars, from the Himalayas to the sea. (*crosses* R)

Bunny. Fancy, mother, a whole nation of liars! Isn't it *dreadful*? (*crosses* C.) (*Slips ring on little finger*)

Mrs. Darrell. Too terrible!

BUNNY. (*absently as if to himself*) What a frightful old thing!

DARRELL. Eh, what's that? (*turns to* BUNNY You needn't have it if you don't want it.

BUNNY. (*with a start, taking ring off*) You misunderstood me, uncle. I said, "What a delightful old ring!" It's too big for my little finger, but I think I could wear it on the third.

DARRELL. It's not the sort of thing you could wear. Better give it away!

BUNNY. (*hurt*) Give it away uncle! How can you make such a suggestion. (*slips ring on tip of third finger*) I shall always treasure it and wear it for the giver's sake.

BUNNY. (*murmurs*) I'm very much disappointed in uncle. He might have brought us some decent presents (*crosses* L) when he was about it instead of these rotten old things.

DARRELL. Well, I must be off now. Old Tugwell will be furious if I keep dinner waiting. Good-bye, Lydia! Sunday at one, eh—? (*shakes hands with* MRS. DARRELL)

MRS. DARRELL. Good-bye, James! Cold boiled beef and salad.

DARRELL. (*to Norah*) Good-bye, my dear. You may call me Uncle James if you like. (*to* NORAH C.)

NORAH. Yes, I should like to very much! Good-bye, Uncle James—and thank you for your lovely presents!

Darrell. It's only a parcel of rubbish my dear! Little bits of trumpery from the bazaars.

Bunny. Oh! uncle! such *lovely* presents!!

Darrell. (*going out, followed by* Bunny *with the valise.*) Now to-morrow morning, young fellow, I'm coming to hear all about this new issue. No backing out of it mind. Plenty of facts and figures.

(*Exit* Darrell, *with* Bunny r.)

Bunny. (*following* Darrell *off*) Oh! yes, uncle, I'll explain everything.

Mrs. Darrell. (*to* Norah c.) Well, he's quite different from what I expected.

Norah. (*looking at her bangles*) I believe he's very kind *really*—in spite of that grumpy manner.

Mrs. Darrell. Now I must go and tell cook about the dinner. So unlucky—and Bunny hates curry! (*moving up* r. *a little*)

Norah. Can't I go?

Mrs. Darrell. No, dear—I must explain—and apologise.

(*Enter* Bunny.)

Bunny. (*gleefully*) I say that's a let-off isn't it?

(*Exit* Mrs. Darrell r.)

I thought we should be saddled with the old boy for at least three or four weeks—He's a rummy old beggar! (*going* c.)

Norah. (*crosses* R.) I rather took to him. (*puckering her forehead*) Bunny, did you really remember his telling you fairy stories and giving you chocolate?

Bunny. Oh, well, lots of elderly people *did* tell me stories and give me chocolates. (*giggles*) But it turned out a bad shot, eh?

Norah. (*after a slight pause*) Bunny——

Bunny. Yes, dear. (*he has picked up the Indian ring, and he holds it up and looks at it*)

Norah. (*hesitating*) I sometimes wish you wouldn't——

Bunny. Wouldn't what, darling?

Norah. Wouldn't be so nice to people to their faces, and then laugh at them behind their backs.

Bunny. (*throwing up ring and catching it*) My darling. Don't we *all* do it? Society wouldn't hold together a day if we didn't!

Norah. (*slowly*) I know we ought to be kind and polite, even to people we don't care about—but——(*to* Bunny)

Bunny. (*ingenuously*) Besides, I do like people to like me. I like to see everybody about me looking smiling and happy—even the servants.

Norah. Yes, but——

Bunny. A little butter goes *such a long* way, and it never hurt anybody.

Norah. No; only sometimes—I wonder——

Bunny. (*smiling at her*) You wonder what, darling? You're getting quite mysterious. But

it suits you. You look so pretty when your eyes grow big and misty, and that little droop comes at the corner of your mouth. One knows that the dimples are there all the time. (*bending over her*) And at a word—a touch——

Norah. (*shrinking a little*) Oh, don't! (*moves* r. *and then turns to him*) Oh, I didn't mean to be horrid. But sometimes I wonder whether you really mean all the pretty things you say to *me*, or whether, in your heart, you are not laughing at me just a little for listening—believing them?

Bunny. (*earnestly*) My darling, what a horrible suspicion. What do you take me for? When I try to tell you what I think of you—what I feel for you—I could never say too much. The trouble is I can't say half enough. (*begins to put ring on third finger*) You really are the sweetest—prettiest—— (*stops short*) There, I've got this beastly ring on, and I don't believe I can get it off again. (c.)

Norah. (*going to him*) Can't you? (*to* Bunny) Let me see—No, it won't move!

Bunny. (*trying to coax it off*) It slipped over the joint quite easily, and now it won't go back again.

Norah. Well, never mind the silly old ring. (*crosses* r., *looking in the glass*) Bunny, you haven't told me yet how you like my new hat?

Bunny. (*looking at her and speaking slowly*) I think it's rather smart—I daresay it might be quite pretty "in the hand," but—but not——

Norah. (*piqued*) But not on my head? (*turning and taking a step to him*)

Bunny. (*very gently*) Well, you see, dearest, to be perfectly frank, your—your neck is too short for such a large hat!

Norah. (*scarcely able to believe her ears*) *What*?

Bunny. (*speaking as though the words were forced out of him against his will*) The truth is, the hat looks as if it were sitting on your shoulders behind—and the effect is a little—just a little, grotesque.

Norah. Oh, is it! Well, I'll never wear it again! (*puts hat on chair and going to him*) But my neck—you called it swanlike once.

Bunny. I don't know what I could have been thinking of.

Norah. Perhaps you didn't mean any of the other things you said to me? (*crosses* L.C.) Perhaps you don't think me pretty at all?

Bunny. (*with a candid tone and expression*) Oh! yes, I *do*—I think you're quite pretty in a simple way.

Norah. But you don't think me the prettiest girl you know—as you've often said.

Bunny. My darling. That sort of speech can't be taken literally.

Norah. Oh, can't it? (*to him and then turn away*) I wonder how many can—of the things you say?

Bunny. (*very kindly and apologetically*) You see, dear child, though you have pretty eyes and charming

colouring, your features would best be described as—well as—nondescript.

Norah. (*with dangerous calm*) Oh! they are, are they. I should like to hear your criticisms in detail. (*crosses* R.C. *and turns to him*) What are my *worst* defects?

Bunny. (*still with the same reluctance and evident anxiety to avoid giving offence*) Well, if you really wish it, your nose would be rather difficult to classify, it doesn't seem to know which way it's going. (*eagerly*) Not that I like it any the worse for that.

Norah. You are too kind! And my mind?—is that as inferior as my looks?

Bunny. (*kindly*) Your *mind*! dear. Your MIND! Well you see, darling, you're only a child, and you can't be expected to shine in conversation. But you are bright and good-tempered, and a man doesn't ask for much more than that in a wife.

Norah. Oh, doesn't he? (*crosses* L.C.) Well, he won't get *that* from me. I may not be pretty, and I may not be clever, but I'm not an amiable imbecile!

Bunny. (*anxiously*) You're not angry, are you, dearest? You said you wanted the truth!

Norah. (*hysterically*) Yes, and I've got it now—in good measure, pressed down and running over. I think I've had enough for the present, thank you. (*turns from him*)

Bunny. (*pleadingly*) Oh, don't take it like that,

darling. You know I didn't mean to hurt you. (*tries to take her hand*)

NORAH. (*pushing him away*) Oh, don't! (*crosses* R.C.)

(*Enter* MRS. DARRELL R.)

MRS. DARRELL. It's time to dress for dinner, children.

NORAH. I don't want any dinner. I'm going to lie down. I've—I've got a headache.

(*Exit* NORAH, *hurriedly* R.)

MRS. DARRELL. (*to* R.C.) What's the matter with her? Have you been quarrelling?

BUNNY. (*stands* L. *of table looking rather dazed*) Oh, no. She asked me one or two questions—what I thought of her, and all that—and I just told her the truth.

MRS. DARRELL. (R.C.) The truth!—to the girl you're engaged to. . . . What's the matter with you, Bunny. Why are you looking at me like that?

BUNNY. (*slowly*) I was just wondering if you could manage to do your front hair so that it met your back hair, and one didn't see the join.

MRS. DARRELL. (*much outraged*) Bunny! How dare you!

CURTAIN

## ACT II.

SCENE.—*The Board-room of the Syrian Cement Company. A solidly furnished official-looking room, with a chair rail round the walls. Below the rail there is a dark toned paper forming a dado; above the rail, distemper of a lighter tint; and above the distemper a picture rail and a plain white frieze. In the wall* L. *there are two windows, with a side table between them, on which stands a telephone. In the middle of the back wall there are mahogany folding doors, opening into a waiting room, beyond which are the stairs. To* R. *of doors there is a low bookcase on which are two large models—a dredging machine and a crane. To* L. *of doors three leather-seated chairs are ranged against the wall. In wall* R. *there is another door, opening into the Secretary's office. Below this door a fireplace, with a plain marble chimneypiece, on which stands a model of a flat barge, a marble clock and a calendar frame. Below the fireplace more chairs. The carpet is a rich Turkey, surrounded by dark felt. Hanging from the picture rail, there are two or three large framed photographs of the Cement Works, and of views of the Nile, with*

*buildings in the distance. Across the middle of the room runs an oblong table, on which ink-bottles and blotting pads are arranged at regular intervals.*

(*As the curtain goes up,* Prosser *comes in through the folding doors at back. He is a tall, thin, depressed-looking man, with a meek, deferential manner, and a melancholy voice. He carries a packet of letters in his hand, which he puts by the pile on the table. He is beginning to arrange the ink bottles and blotting pads in more symmetrical order when* Bunny *comes in* C. *He looks pale and worried.*)

Prosser. (*turning round*) Good-morning, sir. (L.C. *of table*)

Bunny. (*to* R.C. *morosely*) *Good?* Beastly, I call it. Got wet between the cab and the door.

Prosser. (*takes hat and umbrella from* Bunny *and put them in hatstand*) I think it's only a shower. (*to* R.C.) Oh dear, let me wipe the moisture off. (*takes out handkerchief*) You must take care of yourself, Mr. Darrell, for all our sakes.

Bunny. (*curtly*) I'll take jolly good care of myself for my own sake. (*holds up his left hand, and looks at his finger*)

Prosser. (*sympathetically*) Hurt your hand, sir?

Bunny. No, it's this ring. Too tight. Brought on my letters? Any message from Dodd & Gardiner?

Prosser. Yes, sir; they hope to see you at the office this afternoon—after the meeting.

Bunny. Good heavens! Am I *never* to be allowed to have one moment to myself. (*crosses* L. *to telephone*)

Prosser. It's gratifying to know that one is missed, sir.

Bunny. (*goes to telephone*) I wonder how the deuce you know that? 4725 North Western. (*irritably*) 4725 Are you deaf? Prosser, have you filled the ink-pots in my room?

Prosser. Yes, sir.

Bunny. Then fill them up again.

Prosser. I beg your pardon, sir.

Bunny. *Fill them up again!!*

Prosser. (*looks at him doubtfully*) Just as you please, sir.

Bunny. Of course it's just as I please!

(*Exit* Prosser R.)

Hullo! . . . Is Miss Creighton down yet? Oh, is that you, darling? I'm so awfully sorry about yesterday. I think I must have had a touch of the sun. I didn't mean to hurt you. Do please forgive me. Won't you come and take me out to lunch? Teddy and Madame Favre are coming. Ah! do come, darling. I know I don't deserve it. I'm awfully unhappy darling and not at all well! You will! Oh! thank you darling. Good-bye (*hangs up receiver*) Prosser, Prosser, what are you hanging about in there for? (*to* L.C. *front of table*)

(PROSSER *comes out from door* R. *on second* "PROSSER" *to* R. *front of table.*)

Everything ready for the Board Meeting?

PROSSER. Yes, sir, everything.

BUNNY. These all the letters?

PROSSER. (R. *front of table*) Yes, sir, all requiring your immediate attention.

(BUNNY *puts his hand to his forehead and sighs.*)

You'll pardon me but you don't look quite yourself, sir.

BUNNY. No, I'm not feeling at all myself. If I'm not better presently I shall send for the doctor.

PROSSER. (*with lugubrious sympathy*) I noticed you were looking a little yellow as soon as you came in at that door.

BUNNY. (*quietly, but with a vicious gleam in his eye*) And I noticed that your nose was a little red as soon as I came in at the door.

PROSSER. I suffer from chronic dyspepsia, sir.

BUNNY. Ah! that accounts for your morbid charm. Here, you can read them to me. (*sits on centre table*)

PROSSER. I forgot to mention, sir, Mrs. Duckett telephoned to the office that she'd call at 11.30. Urgent business.

BUNNY. I hope to goodness they won't send her on here. Infernal old bore.

PROSSER. Oh, don't say that, sir. A good, steady client in a small way.

Bunny. Hates investing more than thirty-five pounds at a time. More trouble than she's worth.

Prosser. A little difficult, I admit. But that's where your talent comes in, sir. I've often remarked to Mr. Dodd, "The way our Mr. Darrell gets round the clients, and smooths them down, especially the ladies——

Bunny. (*sharply*) Stop talking that damned nonsense and get on with those letters.

Prosser. (r. *end of table opening letter*) From Colonel Moorfield. (*reads*) "Please advise upon enclosed scheme for redistribution of investments."

Bunny. Where is the enclosed scheme?

Prosser. Here, sir, this lengthy document. (*hands* Bunny *the enclosure and continue with mild enthusiasm*) There's a client! I was saying to Mr. Gardiner only the other day, "That's the best client our Mr. Darrell has ever brought us." So restless—never satisfied——

Bunny. (*glancing at enclosure*) Now sit down and write. Are you ready?

Prosser. Quite ready, sir.

(Prosser *produces shorthand block and sits at the other end of table.*)

Bunny. (*dictating*) "Dear Colonel Moorfield, allow me to point out to you that the only people likely to benefit by a redistribution of your investments are ourselves, Dodd & Gardiner, for *we* get our com-

mission, whether you win or lose, and you generally lose. Yours faithfully, Dodd & Gardiner."

PROSSER (*much distressed, rises*) Oh, Mr. Darrell, I do think you must be sickening for something very serious; wouldn't it be best to lay the correspondence aside for the present?

BUNNY. (*shortly*) Next letter.

PROSSER. Mr. Tilney writes: "I have just read a glowing article in the *Vulture* on San Terrificos——

BUNNY. We know all about San Terrificos. (*dictating*) "Dear Tilney——"

PROSSER. (*timidly*) Excuse my interrupting, sir; but you remember—Mr. Gardiner——

BUNNY. Oh, you mean old Gardiner has a lot of the stuff that he wants to unload.

PROSSER. (*shocked*) Oh, don't put it like that, sir.

BUNNY. (*considering*) Well, Mr. Tilney asks my advice, and I must tell him the truth.

PROSSER. Oh, dear, you're not at *all* yourself to-day, sir.

BUNNY. Are you ready? Now write. (*dictating*) "Dear Tilney. . . . You say San Terrificos sound as cheap as dirt—You are quite right. For the very good reason they are—nothing but dirt. (*hesitates and goes on with evident effort*) Don't touch them with a barge pole. Yours faithfully, Dodd & Gardiner."

PROSSER. (*rising, now thoroughly alarmed*) Hadn't I better telephone at once for the doctor, sir?

Bunny. I really think you had (*rises and goes* L. *then crosses* R.)

Prosser. By the time these letters are typed, and ready for your signature, he may have forbidden you to transact any more business. (*collects letters and takes them and notebook to table with telephone*)

Bunny. (*getting up*) Yes, I do seem in rather a dangerous way. Get on to Dr. Masters. It's his day for the City Life and Limb Insurance Office.

Prosser. (*hurries to telephone*) Yes, sir. Central 9346 please. Hullo, hullo! Are you Central 9346? Hold the line, please. You're on now, sir.

(Bunny *crosses* L. *to telephone*).

(*Bell rings as* Prosser *hands receiver to* Bunny.)

Bunny. Just see who that is, Prosser, and whoever it is say I'm busy.

Prosser. Yes, sir. (*exit* Prosser)

Bunny. Hullo. Hullo! Is Dr. Masters there? Ask him to come to the 'phone, will you? Hullo! Is that you, doctor? I wish you'd come round here as soon as you can. 301A Queen Victoria Street—Darrell—Bernard Darrell—I'm not at all well. Oh, I don't know! I think it's some form of cerebral irritation. Cerebral (*shouting*) *irritation* (*shouting*) Yes, come at once.

(*Enter* Prosser.)

Prosser. (*crosses to* L.) An elderly gentleman to see you, sir.

Bunny. I thought I told you I was busy.

Prosser. Yes—but (*looking at card*) I thought—under the circumstances—a relation I think, sir.

Bunny. Yes—my Uncle James. Our new director. Show him in. (Prosser *goes up and stops*) No. Stop a moment, cart a lot of the Company's rubbish in here.

Prosser. Rubbish, sir!

Bunny. (*hurriedly*) Yes, the balance sheets—printed transactions—the silly old maps and those ridiculous plans of the Syrian foreshore.

(Prosser *looks at him, then goes out by door* R.)

(*Goes through* C. *doors and opens waiting-room door and calls. Then strolls across to window* L. *with his hands in his pockets whistling a tune*)

Bunny. Come out, uncle, and come in.

(Mr. Darrell *comes in briskly, puts hat on* L. *top corner of table. He seems pleased with himself. His manner is abrupt, but more genial than on the previous day.*)

Darrell. Here I am—punctual to the tick. And what's more, I've polished off one interview already. My solicitors—my family solicitors were saying to me this morning—(*down* R. *of table, looking at* Bunny *and showing some surprise at his indifferent attitude*) Are you listening to me, young fellow? You haven't put off any important business on my account, I hope?

Bunny. (*at window, with a slight laugh*) Oh no.

I shouldn't dream of doing a thing like that. (*whistles tune*)

Darrell. Thank you!

Bunny. You're quite welcome.

(*Enter* Prosser *from door* R. *with armful of books and papers which he places on* R. *upper corner of table.*)

Darrell. (*turns and looks about the room*) So this is where we work is it?

Bunny. Yes, this is the vineyard wherein I labour.

Darrell. (*looks round again*) Handsome premises. Really quite imposing

Bunny. *Imposing!* Yes, that's just what they're meant to be.

Prosser. (*to* Mr. Darrell, *respectfully*) Good day, sir. (*puts papers on table*)

Darrell. (*cheerfully*) Good-day. . . . Mr. Secretary's secretary, I presume?

Prosser. Yes sir. Mr. Darrell has prepared these for your inspection, sir.

Darrell. Good. Facts and figures—you can't have too many of them. I believe in going into every little detail, however small. Now, Bunny, my boy, to work—to work. When we've got through our business, I want to have a word with you about more private affairs. My family solicitors were saying to me—Are you listening to a word I'm saying?

Bunny. (*who hasn't been attending, at window* L.) Silly old josser!

Darrell. Are you addressing me, young fellow?

Bunny. No, no! It's the doctor. Why does he want to stop and jaw with any one in the street when he knows I'm waiting for him? Ah, that's right. Here he comes. (*turns round, crosses to* C.) Prosser, cart all that stuff back into my room. (*leads* Darrell *up* R. *to door* R.) In there, Uncle James. Here is something to keep you quiet. (*hands him model of barge off mantelpiece and another off bookcase at* R. *back*)

Darrell. (*surprised*) Now look here, young fellow, you said you'd show me everything if I came here this morning. What's this infernal boat, sir!

Bunny. (*unceremoniously*) No—not well—can't be bothered with business—(*pushes* Uncle *through door* R.)

Prosser. (*following, in apologetic tones*) Our Mr. Darrell is not quite himself this morning, sir.

(*Exit* Prosser *with books*)

Darrell. (*in doorway*) So it seems. I've never been treated like this in the whole course of my life. Don't you push me, sir.

(Bunny *pushes* Darrell *through door* R. *and comes down front of table.*)

Dr. Masters. (*he is a man of about forty, second-rate in tone and appearance, but affecting the air of a man of the world. His manner is jaunty, facetious,*

*and overfamiliar. He carries a black bag in his left hand, and addresses* Bunny *with exaggerated cheerfulness*) May Dr. Masters come in? (*putting head round door* C.)

Bunny. Yes, come in, doctor.

Dr. Masters. Good-morning. Well now, what's all this trouble? (*comes down* L.C. *and puts hat and bag on* L. *corner of table*)

Bunny. That's what I want you to tell me, doctor!

Dr. Masters. (*looking* Bunny *up and down*) I don't see much amiss. Eyes a little bloodshot. (*raises lid of* Bunny's L, *eye*) You don't get thinner, do you?

(*Enter* Prosser *and stand back of table listening.*)

Bunny. (*annoyed*) I beg your pardon. I've lost a pound and a quarter in the last year.

Dr. Masters. H'm! Not perceptible. . . . Well now, what are these terrible symptoms?

Bunny. (*slowly and with a due sense of the importance of the subject*) In the first place my head feels large and tight, and my tongue feels hot and dry——

(Dr. Masters *begins to laugh.* Bunny *turns and looks at* Prosser *as he laughs*)

No, no, it's not *that.*

(Prosser *laughs and exits as* Bunny *turns.*)

(*goes on irritably*) No, it's worse, far worse! But it's difficult to explain. I don't seem able to control my speech. You'll hardly credit me, but instead of

saying what I *want* to say, I can't help saying what I really think, and it's devilish awkward.

DR. MASTERS. (*gaily*) Must be! . . . I wonder if it's physical or psychological? Would you say it was an inhibition or an impediment?

BUNNY. (*staring blankly*) A what or a *what*?

DR. MASTERS. You say you use different words from what you intend. If you want some champagne, for example, do you find yourself asking for a bottle of ink!

BUNNY. Oh, no, it's not as bad as that.

DR. MASTERS. H'm! Let's feel your pulse. (*feels* BUNNY'S L. *pulse*) What price gout?

BUNNY. Well, I *had* a grandfather, but I don't think he drank anything but barley water.

DR. MASTERS. You take after your grandmother, I suppose. . . . Look at that finger joint! (*points*) It's all red and puffy.

BUNNY. That's nothing—only my ring. . . . I think it's some form of cerebral irritation—a brain storm coming on.

DR. MASTERS. Possibly gout—flying to the weakest spot! Ha, ha!

BUNNY. Yes, that's very funny, isn't it?

DR. MASTERS. You do yourself pretty well, eh?

BUNNY. (*stiffly*) Is there any reason why I should do myself badly? If you mean to insinuate that I'm a drunkard——

DR. MASTERS. No, no—nonsense. . . . But I

should just like to know what you *do* take in the course of the day.

Bunny. A little light claret with my dinner.

Dr. Masters. Not a whisky and soda at lunch? And another for tea?

Bunny. Oh, possibly. I didn't think you'd count that.

Dr. Masters. You dine out a lot, and then you take your whack, eh? All the fizz you can get, couple of glasses of port, and a liqueur with your coffee.

Bunny. (*feebly*) One must take something for the good of the house.

Dr. Masters. H'm. I should say you binged up fairly well. But that wouldn't quite account for the symptoms. (*with a sly look, and the suggestion of a nudge*) Been on the razzle-dazzle, eh?

Bunny. (*eyeing him with stony disapproval*) I beg your pardon?

Dr. Masters. Come, come, you needn't put on frills with me. We are both men of the world.

Bunny. (*curtly*) *You* may be, but if you are then I hope I'm not! That's all.

Dr. Masters. There *do* seem indications of cerebral irritation—just pull off your coat. We'll soon see what's the matter, I shan't hurt you.

(Bunny *takes his coat off.*)

Bunny. I'll take damned good care you don't! Not twice anyway.

Dr. Masters. Now shut your eyes, and stand on one leg.

Bunny. Stand on one leg! (*stands on one leg and wobbles*)

Dr. Masters. (*catching him by the shoulder*) Thank you. (*uses stethoscope and puts his ear against* Bunny's *back.* Bunny *faces* r.) Now take a deep breath, please—again.

(*Sound of voices in waiting-room.*)

Prosser. But you can't, madam, he's particularly engaged.

Mrs. Duckett. (*outside*) But I tell you I *will.*

Prosser. But Mrs. Duckett, Mrs. Duckett!

(*Folding doors burst open and* Mrs. Duckett *plunges in. She is a stout, middle-aged woman, in a brown dress, black cape or mantle, and bonnet trimmed with violets which is slightly on one side, she carries a damp umbrella and a leather hand-bag which seems to be bursting with papers. As she comes in,* Bunny *hastily clutches at his coat.*)

Mrs. Duckett. Mr. Darrell, I must see you. Oh! (*gives a shriek and backs on to* Prosser's *foot*)

Bunny. (*struggling into coat*) I can't attend to you now, Mrs. Duckett. I'm very much engaged with my doctor.

Mrs. Duckett. (*does a right about turn, and speaks with her back to* Bunny) But my business is urgent—that thirty-five pounds—I'll wait till you're dressed.

Bunny. Yes, but I may have to take everything off. (*looks at* Doctor)

Dr. Masters. Yes, I must insist on a thorough examination.

Mrs. Duckett. (*pushes* Prosser *aside, and hurries out, saying over her shoulder*) I shall return in twenty minutes.

(*Exit.*)

Bunny. (*to* Prosser) Prosser, give Mrs. Duckett a glass of sherry and a biscuit.

Prosser. Yes, sir.

(*Exit* Prosser.)

Bunny (*to* Dr. Masters, *wrathfully*) Why did the fool let her in?

Dr. Masters. You can't keep women out nowadays. If you eject them by the door, they come in by the hot water pipes.

Bunny. Well, have you found out what's the matter with me?

Dr. Masters. (*solemnly*) My diagnosis is—Incipient encephalitis.

Bunny. (*inquiringly*) Incipient encephalitis?

Dr. Masters. With degeneration of the higher efferent nerve-tracks and involvement—slight involvement—of the medulla oblongata.

Bunny. (*alarmed*) Is it curable?

Dr. Masters. It sometimes yields to treatment, in this early stage.

BUNNY. What do you advise?

DR. MASTERS. I should recommend a rest cure. I know of a nice little home in Margaret Street. The matron is a friend of mine, and you'd be under my own eye.

BUNNY. Yes, I know that nice little home. (*goes* R.) Twelve guineas a week, feed you on Colonial mutton and tinned beans and you have to promise marriage to the nurse before you can get away.

DR. MASTERS. (*offended*) Oh well, if you set your face against a rest cure——

BUNNY. Yes, I do!

DR. MASTERS. I should suggest a month at Llandrindod——

BUNNY. No, thank you, I've had some.

DR. MASTERS. I could give you a letter to a doctor there, and tell you of a comfortable hotel, a good chemist, and——

BUNNY. (*irritably*) Not me! I'm not going to get up early and swill dirty water, in order that you may pocket a commission from every harpy in the place. (*crosses* L.)

DR. MASTERS. That's a most uncalled for remark. Of course, if you refuse to follow my advice——

BUNNY. (*excitedly*) Yes, I *do* refuse. I don't believe I've got encephalitis or oblongata or anything. You say silly things of that sort when you don't know what's the matter with me. You're a humbug and a wind-bag, and—and I don't like

your boots. (*working himself up*) If you knew your business, you'd say my illness was due to over-work and worry instead of blithering about wine and women. It's damned impertinent, sir, and next time I want a doctor I'll get a letter to a dispensary, you hear—a letter to a dispensary. (*shouting*) Prosser, Prosser ! Prosser ! ! show this idiot out. (*turns away*) (Prosser *hurries in on 3rd "* Prosser.")

Dr. Masters. (*alarmed and angry up* R.C. *to* L. *back of table*) Really, Mr. Darrell, you are certainly not yourself.

Bunny. Show him out ! Show him out ! !

Dr. Masters. There are marked symptoms of brain storm. (*shakes his head at* Prosser *and murmurs as he goes out*) Afraid it's rather serious—case for specialist.

Prosser. (*in same tone*) Seems to be getting violent. Hope he won't do any one a mischief.

(Prosser *and* Dr. Masters *go out whispering together.* Bunny *throws bag after him.* Mr. Darrell *looks out of the secretary's office.*)

Darrell. Are you alone, sir ? (*comes down with papers in his hand*) I never heard such a row in the whole course of my life. It's impossible to do any work in there. I've been through those books of yours and I can't make head or tail of the gibberish they contain. (*to* R. *top corner of table and put paper on it*)

(Bunny *to front of table and moves* Darrell's *hat to top edge of table.*)

Bunny. (*carelessly*) I can't help that. I can find you documents, but I can't find you brains to understand them.

Darrell. (*hardly able to believe his ears*) Eh, what? Those books seem to have been kept by a committee of district visitors. (*to* R.C.)

Bunny. (*impudently*) Well, could you wish for anything more virtuous and respectable.

Darrell. (*solemnly and impressively*) This morning I have been with my solicitors, drafting out a new will. (*to front of table* C.)

Bunny. (*to front of table* C. *pricking up his ears*) Oh! (*looking pleased*)

Darrell. Ah, that interests you, does it?

Bunny. Of course it does.

Darrell. You're frank, anyway. (*in softer tone*) I see you're still wearing my ring.

Bunny. Yes, but only because I can't get the beastly thing off.

Darrell. Beastly! Why yesterday you said it was a delightful old ring, and you would always treasure it for the giver's sake.

Bunny. One has to talk that sort of rot.

Darrell. (*down* R.) Rot, sir! You wanted to please me, I suppose—to make a good impression on your old uncle?

Bunny. You're getting quite bright.

Darrell. (*keenly*) What, sir! And why were you so anxious to please me, may I ask?

(Bunny *smiles and shrugs his shoulders.*)

Because I'm rich, eh?

Bunny. (*carelessly*) Well, you didn't suppose it was for yourself alone? Did you?

Darrell. (*firing up*) You young reprobate! How dare you speak to me like that! I've never been spoken to like that in India or any other country. I see it all quite plainly. (*checking himself and gulping down his wrath*) . . . So that was why you killed the fatted calf?

Bunny. That's why we provided Mulligatawny, cayenne pepper and hot bottles.

Darrell. Casting your Mulligatawny, cayenne pepper and hot bottles on the water. You thought they would return to you in the shape of rupees.

Bunny. (*simply*) Yes; and mother thought so too.

Darrell. (*goes* R.) Your mother thought so too, did she? And why sir—why should I squander my hard-earned savings on a young reprobate like you?

Bunny. (*rise with sudden pathos*) Because I'm your only brother's only son.

Darrell. Bah! Sir. If my only brother wanted me to take the slightest interest in his only son, he should have produced a brighter specimen.

Bunny. (*nettled*) With a little care he might

have given me a superior uncle. I could have chosen a better one for myself off any old Board of Guardians. (*goes* L.C.)

Darrell. (*trying to keep cool*) Now, look here sir, I'm not sure, not at all sure, whether you're a knave or a fool——

Bunny. (*to* Darrell R.C.) But I'm sure that you're a cantankerous old boy. You say you *like* plain speaking, but when you get it, you snort and turn purple.

Darrell. (*losing his temper*) Oh, go to the devil!

Bunny. (*pretending to be shocked*) Oh! uncle. (*crosses* L.) You promised on my behalf that I should *renounce* the devil and all his works. Call yourself a godfather! You're a disgrace to the profession.

(*Enter* Prosser.)

Darrell. I shall go straight back to my solicitors (*up* R. *of table to back*) and cut you out of my will.

Prosser. Mrs. Duckett again, sir.

(Mrs. Duckett *brushes him aside and peeps in.*)

Mrs. Duckett. Is he dressed? (*comes in down* L.) Now, Mr. Darrell, I must ask you to give me your undivided attention. (Bunny *goes to left corner of table* C.) I'm not at all satisfied with the latest

reports of the company—and I want a thorough explanation.

Darrell. (*looking in surprise from one to the other*) I take it, this lady is a shareholder.

Mrs. Duckett. (*turning on* Mr. Darrell) Yes, sir, I have thirty-five pounds in the Syrian Cement Company, and I don't intend to lose my money.

Bunny. (L.C., *fixes her with a baleful eye, and says in confidential tone*) Mrs. Duckett, I think it only kind to tell you that your bonnet is a little on one side.

Mrs. Duckett. (*dropping her umbrella, and putting both hands to her head. In stage whisper*) Which way? Which way? (*puts bonnet more on one side*)

Bunny. (*picks up umbrella and hands it to her. In same tone*) No, the *other* way.

Mrs. Duckett. I represent other shareholders—my niece and sister-in-law. (*enter* Prosser, *down* R. *to* Bunny) I'll speak my mind at the next general meeting, and then you'll see. (*glancing at* Bunny, *who has picked up her umbrella*)

Prosser. A lady and gentleman to see you, sir, by appointment. (*goes up*)

Bunny. Good. Wait a moment, Prosser. (*struck with happy thought*) Mrs. Duckett, let me introduce my Uncle James. He's our new director. He can tell you what we're doing with your thirty-five pounds. (*takes* Mrs. Duckett L. *of table up to* Darrell, *back of table*)

(MRS. DUCKETT *looks doubtfully at* MR. DARRELL, *who begins to protest.*)

(*goes on brightly*) Uncle James, I'm sure you'd like to take Mrs. Duckett out to lunch. (*patting them, and edging them to the door*)

DARRELL. (*protesting*) What, sir, take that old thing out! (MRS. DARRELL *down* L.)

BUNNY. She's rather wearing, but *I* have to put up with her.

MRS. DUCKETT. You can't put *me* off.

BUNNY. Uncle James is full of rupees, Mrs. Duckett.

(*By this time* BUNNY *has coaxed them through doors back.*)

DARRELL. (*in doorway, much annoyed*) Now look here, sir. I shall return for the Board Meeting, solely out of respect to my old friend Hayter, and then I've done with you. Don't answer me back, I've done with you and I'll cut you out of my will. (*Exit.*)

BUNNY. Now then, Mrs. Duckett, after Uncle James—it's the chance of your life.

(*Exit* MRS. DUCKETT, *who speaks before exit.*)

PROSSER. I think she'll catch him, sir.

BUNNY. (*eagerly*) Prosser, the young ladies, quick! (*down* L. *front of table to* R.C.)

PROSSER. (*gloomily*) There's only one. The other's a young gentleman.

(Prosser *shows in* Rosalie *and* Teddy Lestrange.)

Bunny. (*looks over* Rosalie's *head*) How d'ye do? But where's Norah?

Rosalie. (*to* Bunny r.c., r. *of table*) Soyez tranquille. Norah is well, she is how you say—shopping. (Lestrange *down to front of table*)

Lestrange. Yes, she's laying in a supply of penny toys.

Rosalie. M. Lestrange and I are going all the rounds—the Mansion House—the Tower—all! We leave Norah here with you and come for her later—is it not!

Bunny. (r.) I see—I see—yes!

Rosalie. (r.c.) Yes—but what is it, M. Bunny—with you and Norah—what has happened? She is so sad.

Lestrange. I never saw any one so absolutely sideways.

Bunny. We had a sort of disagreement, but I'm going to take her out to lunch.

Lestrange. That's the ticket—stand her a pint of Heidsieck. (*goes* l.)

Rosalie. Ah, M. Bunny—she is so miserable; she has a heart of gold—for your own sake I pray you, monsieur, do not let such a dear girl be lost to you.

Bunny. But I've no intention of losing her if I can possibly help it

Rosalie. Then you must make her feel that you adore her! Ah, you Englishmen, you do not know how to make love — you are all too serious.

Lestrange. *I'm* not really serious. That's only my pose.

Bunny. You don't understand. I'm really very fond of Norah.

Rosalie. Ah then, tell her so, pay her the compliments—make her happy—tell her that she has the figure more lovely than the Venus de Milo. Tell her her face is more beautiful than the angels, and that not one of all the lovely women that ever lived is worth her little finger—voilà.

Bunny. No, I couldn't tell her that.

Rosalie. No, mais pourquoi donc!

Bunny. (*seriously*) Because it wouldn't be the truth.

Rosalie. Ah! mais c'est ridicule! The truth, you must be ill to speak of the truth; it is impossible! (*crosses* L. *front of table and sit chair* L. *end of table*)

Lestrange. Do you think you're strong enough to talk about me? I want to have a dabble on something. What *do* you advise?

Bunny. If you come to me as a stockbroker, I should recommend Consols at 82. But if you come to me as a friend, I should advise you to find some nice little woman, marry her, and get her to look after you and your money. It's the same kind of advice

I should give to any one with the same kind of face.

(*Enter* Norah C., *she carries some small toys in her hands; puts them on* R. *end of table.*)

Rosalie. (*rises, slightly embarrassed*) Ah, viola Norah, she has bought all the play toys—— (Norah *to* R. *of table.* Bunny *places chair for her to sit* R. *of table*)

Bunny. (*eagerly*) Norah! I thought you were never coming. (*takes her hands, toys and all*)

Rosalie. We will go now, monsieur, they do not want us any more. Au revoir, monsieur.

(*Exeunt* Rosalie *and* Lestrange *quickly.*)

Bunny. (*sits table beside* Norah) Au revoir, madame. (*tenderly, looking at* Norah) Norah, darling, you look so pale. And I do believe you've been crying.

Norah. I know it's silly.

Bunny. (*penitently*) You make me feel the most heartless beast. I never thought I should live to make you cry.

Norah. Never mind about me. Are you better? Have you seen the doctor?

Bunny. (*grimly*) I've seen some one with M.D tacked on to his name.

Norah. What did he say was the matter?

Bunny. Incipient encephalitis.

Norah. Bunny!

Bunny. Yes, darling. With oblongatas.

Norah. (*alarmed*) Does it hurt?

Bunny. No, but it's rather uncomfortable.

Norah. But is it dangerous?

Bunny. It's not catching. But, never mind about me. It's you I want to talk about. Have you forgiven me?

Norah. For the things you said yesterday? Well, I did feel rather bad about them. . . .

Bunny. So did I. . . .

Norah. But, after all, if I couldn't stand the truth —I'd no business to ask for it. And—and I looked in the glass this morning, and I see my neck *is* rather short.

Bunny. Yes, dearest—but I don't *honestly* admire a girl with a very long neck—she always looks as she wanted a martingale. . . .

Norah. But, oh, Bunny, I *should* like to be swan-like and classically beautiful for *your* sake.

Bunny. Darling, I fell in love with *you*—as you are—and I don't want you any different.

Norah. I'm glad. . . . And, Bunny, I do think it was fine of you to tell me the truth when I asked you. I know how you hate hurting people's feelings . . . you like to make everybody pleased with themselves.

Bunny. (*thoughtfully*) I don't seem to be able to manage it just now.

Norah. But the pretty speeches were for the

*other* people—weren't they ?—I was different, wasn't I ? You felt you could trust me—even with the truth—because I was going to be your wife.

(Bunny *puts his hand under her chin, and speaks earnestly.*)

Bunny. My dear, you're a bigger little girl than I took you for—— (*kisses her—getting up*) Now we must go and have a quick lunch. (*crosses* L. *and get hat*) It'll amuse you to see the financiers feed.

Norah. I'll leave my toys here. There's a dying pig I got for you, Bunny.

Bunny. (*crosses* R.C. *front of table to* Norah) Thank you, dear. It'll amuse the directors when things go wrong with the Company.

(*Enter* Prosser.)

Prosser. Another lady called to see you, sir.

Bunny. Oh ! confound it ! Who is it !

Prosser. She wouldn't give her name. Might be a client sent on from Dodd & Gardiner.

Bunny. I'm afraid I must see her. (*to* Norah) You won't mind waiting in my office, dear—I shan't be longer than I can help.

(*He puts* Norah *in office,* R.)

(*Exit* Norah.)

(Prosser *goes out and opens waiting-room door to admit* Mrs. Hayter.)

(*Enter* Mrs. Hayter.)

Bunny. (*starting; down* R., *then to front of table*) Melisande! Mrs. Hayter! (*he glances nervously at the office door*)

Mrs. Hayter. (*rapidly, down* L.) Yes, I *had* to come. I knew you'd be here. (*to* C.) Bunny, something has happened—I'm sure that my husband suspects——

Bunny. Suspects! Suspects what?

Mrs. Hayter. (*to him*) The worst, of course! Somebody must have been talking. Last night he was so strange in his manner, and he looked so—so very *odd*.

Bunny. (*naïvely*) I never saw him look anything else.

Mrs. Hayter. I came to warn you. I knew you'd be seeing him to-day.

Bunny. (*looking round*) Yes (*crosses* L.) he may be here any moment.

Mrs. Hayter. No, he's always late. . . .

Bunny. (L.C.) But people are always in and out. (*waving his hands vaguely*) In and out. Clerks, clients, directors, nobody knows who.

Mrs. Hayter. (*to him*) Bunny, now that I know your secret. . . .

Bunny. (*puzzled*) Secret! What secret?

Mrs. Hayter. (*with tender reproach*) Have you forgotten what you told me yesterday?

Bunny. Lots of silly things, I expect. (*crosses* R., *trying to lead the conversation into a lighter vein*) You know what an old chatterbox I am.

Mrs. Hayter. Of course, I had long suspected—guessed the truth—but everything seems different now that I have learnt it from your own lips. Bunny, your devotion has been humble, silent, dog-like . . . giving everything and asking nothing. . . . (*impressively*) You are about to have your reward. (*to him*)

Bunny. (*looks round* R. *at office door,* R.) Eh?

Mrs. Hayter. My husband may suspect . . . may forbid you the house, but now that I know the truth . . . I'll never give you up.

Bunny. I was afraid you wouldn't.

Mrs. Hayter. But this absurd engagement . . . (*crosses down* L.) it must be broken off at once. . . .

Bunny. *What!!*

Mrs. Hayter. Tell that child you've made a foolish mistake, and ask her to set you free. . . .

Bunny. (*blankly*) But I don't *want* to. I'm very fond of her.

Mrs. Hayter. (*from him*) Yes, as you might be fond of a kitten or a canary. (*turn to him*) But you know that there is only one woman in the world for you. We met—alas! too late—(*to him*) but there *are* compensations.

(Bunny *retreats.*)

Bunny. Stop! I'm awfully sorry—I hate to hurt your feelings. . . . But I'm not in love with you . . . I never was—and I never shall be. . . .

MRS. HAYTER. (*in blank amazement*) Bunny!—are you mad?——

BUNNY. And I'm perfectly certain you're not in love with me. Otherwise—you wouldn't be content with our beautiful innocent friendship.

MRS. HAYTER. (*gasping*) But this is *monstrous!* (*turn and down* L.)

BUNNY. (*to* C.) The truth is, we've both been playing a part—trying to spoof each other . . . You liked to have an ornamental tame cat about the house—and I liked to be thought *au mieux* with an attractive woman. I also liked your dinners, and I met useful people at your house. . . . In return for your hospitality, I ran your errands—took your dog for walks, and listened to you when you talked about yourself . . . It was a fair enough bargain on both sides—and nobody has been a penny the worse.

MRS. HAYTER. (*to him*) How dare you! (*crosses* R.) How *dare* you!

BUNNY. I was afraid there would be a scene yesterday when you heard I was engaged, because women hate losing anything—even when they don't really want it. So I talked all that stuff just to soothe your vanity—and let you down easy.

MRS. HAYTER. Oh, this is intolerable. . . . (*up* R.) I've never been so insulted in my life. . . . (*down* R.C.) You shall suffer for this!—I'll —I'll denounce you. I'll tell my husband . . . I'll tell him *everything*.

BUNNY. But there's nothing to tell. . . .

Mrs. Hayter. (*to him*) I'll show him your letters. When he reads those glowing words (*down* R.) those fiery phrases——

Bunny. (*uneasily*) You wouldn't do that. Think of your own reputation.

Mrs. Hayter. (*passionately, up* R.) I don't care about that so long as I can be revenged on you.

Bunny. Oh! what an awful woman.

Mrs. Hayter. I don't care if he divorces me. (*down to* R.C.) Your ridiculous letters will be read out in Court—grammar and all—and you'll *have* to *marry* me.

Bunny. (*piously*) Oh! anything but that. Remember, I'm next door to a pauper. How would you like to live on tuppence a year at Hampstead, or rather Coventry, for that's where they'd send us to.

Mrs. Hayter. (*in slightly sobered tones*) Then I shall tell my husband that you've grossly insulted me. . . .

(*Tapping at door of Secretary's office and* Norah's *voice is heard calling.*)

(Mrs. Hayter *starts.*)

Mrs. Hayter. Who's that? (*turns her head and looks at door* R. *and then down* L.)

Norah. Bunny!

(*Enter* Norah.)

Mrs. Hayter. Miss Creighton!

Norah. (*down* R.) Mrs. Hayter!

MRS. HAYTER. You've been there all the time—listening!

NORAH. (*surprised*) No, I held my hands over my ears when you talked so loud.

BUNNY. Good girl! Good girl!

MRS. HAYTER. We were discussing—some confidential business——

BUNNY. (*up round* R. *of table to back*) But our confidential business is finished. I'll tell *taxi* to get you a Prosser.

MRS. HAYTER. I beg your pardon, our business is *not* finished.

NORAH. (*looking from one to the other*) Bunny, what does it all mean?

MRS. HAYTER. (*to* C.) Our business concerns you too, Miss Creighton. You might be interested to hear——

BUNNY. (*warningly down* L.) Mrs. Hayter! I warn you——

MRS. HAYTER. That only yesterday Mr. Darrell told me I was the only woman he really loved.

NORAH. (*recoiling*) Oh! (*appealingly; crosses* L. *to* BUNNY) Bunny, it isn't true?

BUNNY. (*speaking as though the words were forced out of him*) *Technically* speaking, it is. But indeed I can explain.

NORAH. (*turning away*) It would take a good deal of explaining.

MRS. HAYTER. He also told me that he only proposed to you to please his mother. (*down* R.)

Norah. Bunny, is *that* true?

Bunny. (*in great agony*) *Verbally* speaking, it is, but indeed—indeed, I can explain.

Norah. (*bitterly*) I don't see how even *you* can explain *that* away.

Mrs. Hayter. (*maliciously*) It would be quite an achievement, wouldn't it? (*sit chair above fireplace* R.)

Bunny. (*going to* Norah *and speaking very earnestly*) I knew she'd be jealous, and I was a coward. But I was only rotting.

Norah. Why *should* she be jealous? (*crosses* L.) She's married?

Bunny. (*to* C.) Because I've been having a flirtation with her . . . but I love *you!* and only you, and ask nothing better than to marry you!

Norah. (*mournfully*) How can I tell what to believe? You admit you were lying yesterday; how do I know you are speaking the truth to-day?

Bunny. Because——

Norah. (*crosses* C., Bunny *down* L.) You say one thing to people before their faces, and another thing about them behind their backs——

Bunny. (*with sincerity*) I always say the same to you, dear.

Norah. I can't trust you any longer. You've broken my faith between you—you and she. (*a step down and back to table*). I daresay I was silly to be taken in so easily. (*takes off her ring*) I know you hate scenes, so I won't make one. (*lays ring on table*) Good bye! (*up* R.C.)

Bunny. Norah! you're not going to give me up?

(Rosalie *and* Teddy Lestrange *come in*! Lestrange *goes* L.)

Norah. (R.C. *up, going to her*) Rosalie, let's get away! Let's go home!

Rosalie. Oh, ma pauvre enfant! qu' est-ce que tu as?

Norah. He doesn't love me. He told *her* he didn't. He only proposed to me to please his mother He told *her* he did.

Rosalie. (sternly, to *Bunny*) Ah, mais monsieur!

Bunny. (*with anguish written all over him*) In a way that is *so*. But if I only had time to explain.

Mrs. Hayter. I should think Miss Creighton has had enough of your explanations. (*sits chair* R.)

Bunny. But, Norah, darling——

(Norah *and* Rosalie *to door* C. *Exit* Norah.)

Rosalie. (*with cold contempt, down to back of table*) Eh! bien, monsieur. Avant de partir je veux dire que votre conduite est détestable—Espèce d'imbécile.

(*Exit after* Norah.)

Lestrange. (*going up to doors* C. *and speaking with stern disapproval*) I'm *surprised* at you, Bunny! —and *shocked* at you, and—and utterly *disgusted* at you! (*gradually up* L. *of table to door* C.)

(*Exit* Teddy Lestrange.)

Bunny. (*getting up and turning to* Mrs. Hayter) Now I hope you're satisfied. You've wrecked my life—ruined my chance of happiness—lost me the only girl I ever lo—wanted to marry—well, you've got your revenge!

Mrs. Hayter. (*with a slight laugh*) Heroics are not in your line.

Prosser. Mr. Hayter has just arrived, sir. (Mrs. Hayter *half rises*) He's downstairs talking to a gentleman.

Mrs. Hayter. (*rise and crosses* L. *front of table*) My husband! He mustn't find me here.

Bunny. (*with cool indifference*) I thought yo wanted to tell him everything. I'm sure I don't care.

Mrs. Hayter. (*angrily*) Don't be ridiculous! (*crosses* R.) If I go now I shall meet him on the stairs. (*looking round*) Is that your office? I'll wait in there till I can slip away. (*goes to door of office*)

Bunny. You can't go in there—there's a Board meeting—— (*after* Mrs. Hayter, R.C.)

Mrs. Hayter. Bother the Board meeting!

(*Exit through door* R.)

(*Enter* Prosser.)

(*Enter* Mr. Hayter, C. *He is a man of about* 50—*tall, pale, and attenuated. He has scanty sandy hair, a long thin face, with a high forehead, an aquiline nose, a long upper lip, and an intensely self-satisfied expression. In voice and manner he resembles a*

*refined and highly intellectual elderly lady. At this moment he looks harassed and perturbed.*)

Hayter. How d'ye do? I've come early because I wanted a word with you. But first (*going to door of Secretary's room*) let me see the Minute-book.

Bunny. (*getting between him and door* R., *pushes* Hayter *to chair* C. *of table*) It's here.

Hayter. (*going to door* R.) But the notes of my speech——

Bunny. (*Pulls him back by* R. *arm,* Hayter *sits chair* C. *of table*) They're in the Minute-book.

Hayter. But I left them on the mantelpiece.

Bunny. I took them off the mantelpiece and put them in the Minute-book. Those are the only notes you'll get.

Hayter. But these are not my notes.

Bunny. Yes they are, I copied them out on foolscap. I thought it would be more appropriate.

Hayter. (*picks up paper and looks at it*) It's no use. I can't fix my attention. (*rise and down* R.C. *towards door of Secretary's office.*)

(Bunny *gets between him and door* R.)

Darrell, I'm infernally worried. (*to front of table*)

Bunny. (*gloomily*) Something occurred to upset you *too*? (*down* R.C.)

Hayter. (*putting his hand to his forehead*) I don't know what to think—what to believe?

Bunny. (*sympathetically*) Been let in for a modern antique!

Hayter. (*goes* L.) No—even worse than that. (*hesitates*) The fact is, I've had an anonymous letter about my wife.

Bunny. (*startled*) But surely you threw it in the fire?

Hayter. Of course that was my first impulse. But my suspicions have been further aroused. Last night I found her reading some old letters. When I came in she hastily shuffled them into her work-box—(*step* L.)

Bunny. I should have thought she'd want a Saratoga trunk.

Hayter. (*to* Bunny, C.) Then I remembered that just before she went to Dinard she told me she'd been spending the afternoon with her aunt in Brompton Square. I happened to meet her aunt, and found that my wife hadn't called on her for six months! (*goes* L.)

Bunny. (*sotto voce*) I don't blame her. I know that aunt.

Hayter. (*to* Bunny) Now you're an old friend of the family and I want you to help me.

Bunny. (*uneasily*) Anything I can do, I shall be only too glad—

Hayter. You're constantly at our house. I've always been pleased that you should keep my wife company when I was away. Of course, I knew you were perfectly *safe*.

Bunny. (*raising his eyebrows*) I! Safe!

Hayter. Yes—I knew there could be no possible *danger*.

BUNNY. (*with a vexed laugh*) You're very much out in your reckoning. Why, I'm considered one of the most dangerous men in Hampstead.

HAYTER. (*laughs*) Oh, nonsense! (*goes* L.) Why, I'd trust any of my female relations alone with you at *any* time. (*from him*)

BUNNY. That's very curious!

HAYTER. What's curious?

BUNNY. That's exactly what I've always thought about *you*.

HAYTER. About *me*? (*with an angry laugh; to* BUNNY) My dear fellow, you're quite on the wrong tack. I don't wish to boast, but the women simply flock to my lectures at the Ritz—on the Love Literature of the Orient, and I have been described as the biggest flirt in the Royal Society.

BUNNY. You amaze me! And I thought I understood women.

HAYTER. Pooh! You've never been in the East.

BUNNY. No, but I've knocked about the West End a goodish bit—— (*goes* R., *then back to* R.C.) they don't know everything East of Suez.

HAYTER. (*impressively*) What I want to ask you, as an old friend, is this—had you any suspicion that some rascal was making love to my wife?

BUNNY. (*hesitating*) Well, I——

HAYTER. Ah! I see you had. Have you any idea who he is?

BUNNY. (*with a self-conscious simper*) I'm afraid I have

Hayter. Then tell me his name.

Bunny. I don't want to do that. I'd rather not do that. But it was all right—it was purely platonic—he was only humbugging.

Hayter. (*angrily*) But he'd no business to humbug with my wife—confound his impudence! Besides, how do *you* know it was strictly platonic?

(Bunny *is silent.*)

I insist on your telling me who he is.

Bunny. (*piteously*) But I don't want to.

Hayter. I *will* have the truth—come, out with it! Come!

Bunny. (*casting down his eyes*) Well—I'm afraid—it's me.

Hayter. You! (*laughs*) Oh, come, you can't take me in. Oh! I see. (*goes* L.C.) You're trying to shield some other fellow.

Bunny. (*indignantly*) If you think I'm incapable of flirting with a married woman——

Hayter. (*to* Bunny) Once again, who is he?—the *real* man?

Bunny. I tell you *I am* the real man!

(*Pause.*)

Hayter. (*slowly*) Can such things be? To think that a woman who has once been loved by *me*—

Bunny. (*in stern admonitory tone*) You've only yourself to blame. You left her alone all day while you were lecturing to a parcel of old frumps, on sultry subjects. You've been a selfish, neglectful, unsatis-

factory husband, and it's no fault of yours if your wife did not run off the rails.

Hayter. (*in exculpatory tones*) I surrounded her with luxuries——

Bunny. And denied her necessities—affection—sympathy—companionship——

Hayter. She's no companion to an intellectual man like myself.

Bunny. Oh, I'm not saying she can't be tiresome. (*to* R. *end of table and sit*)

Hayter. Intensely irritating! (*to* L. *end of table and sit*)

Bunny. Yes. When she *will* talk about herself and her imaginary troubles.

(Hayter *leans against* L. *end of table,* Bunny *on* R. *end and they gradually edge closer to each other, till they are side by side.*)

Hayter. (*moving closer to* Bunny) Yes—hour after hour!

Bunny. Day after day—always discontented!

Hayter. I could put up with that if only she wouldn't *pose!*

(*Enter* Mrs. Hayter, *unseen, door* R.)

Bunny. (*moving closer to* Hayter) Yes; when she tries to talk Art and Literature.

Hayter. (*with a gesture of helplessness*) Often and often have I sat on thorns——

Bunny. It's a pity, too—because she's not at all a bad old sort when she's her own silly self!

(*By this time they are side by side on the* C. *of the table.*

Mrs. Hayter. (*Has come down to back of table and bangs it; furiously*) How *dare* you two stand there, and talk about me like that!

(Bunny *and* Hayter *start apart.* Bunny *down* R.) Hayter *down* L.

Bunny. Mrs. Hayter!
Hayter. Mélisande! } (*In consternation.*)

Mrs. Hayter. (*to her husband*) If you were a *man* you'd punish him for his insolence! (*to* Bunny) And if you weren't a *cur* you'd protect me from his insults! . . . (*to both men; down* R.C.) Tiresome, am I? Irritating, am I? And what are *you*?—One a brainless young bounder——

Bunny. Bounder!

Mrs. Hayter. And the other a pedantic old bore! (*to* L. *end of table*)

Hayter. Bore!

Mrs. Hayter. (*going up* L.C.) Yes, and I've done with you *both!*

Hayter. (*stops her. She goes* L. *front of table*) Not so fast! I must ask you to explain how you came to be here—concealed in this—this person's private room? (*down* L.)

Mrs. Hayter. (*struggling to recover her self-control*) I came because I knew you would be here. Yesterday he insulted me—grossly insulted me!

Hayter. How?

MRS. HAYTER. By declaring his guilty passion for me.

HAYTER. What! (*crosses* R. *to* BUNNY) You told me there had been nothing but a harmless flirtation—which I could well believe. But is what she says correct?

BUNNY. (*reluctantly*) *Literally* speaking, it is. But when I——

HAYTER. (*turning away*) And this is the man I trusted like a brother—who has eaten my quails and drunk my Moet!

BUNNY. (*miserably*) But when I declared my guilty passion I was only trying to cheer her up.

HAYTER. Then you're a liar, sir—as well as a Lothario. But I refuse to accept your explanation (*to his wife*) or yours. You knew I wasn't expected here till one o'clock—why did you come earlier?—and why did you conceal yourself when I arrived?

MRS. HAYTER. (*hesitating*) Because——(*down* L.)

HAYTER. (*to* BUNNY) I put it to you, am I to believe that my wife came here with the purpose of denouncing you to me?

BUNNY. No!

MRS. HAYTER. Idiot!

HAYTER. What did she come for?

BUNNY. To warn me that your suspicions were aroused.

HAYTER. Ah!

BUNNY. And to urge me to break off my engagement.

Mrs. Hayter. Imbecile!

Hayter. (*commanding himself by an effort*) And why did she urge you to do that?

Bunny. (*reluctantly*) In order that we might continue our beautiful innocent friendship.

Mrs. Hayter. Cad!

Hayter. (*losing his self-control*) Trait[illegible]! I shall go straight from this room and instruct my solicitors. Beautiful innocent friendship! Tell that to the President of the Divorce Court! (*with increasing wrath*) You're a libertine, sir—a profligate! You're a menace to society! But I'll expose you—I'll ruin you—I'll claim record damages—I'll force you to marry my wife! And meantime, I'll have personal satisfaction—defend yourself, sir!

(*He clenches his fists threateningly and dances in front of* Bunny, *who looks at him in a kind of stupefied amazement.*)

Mrs. Hayter. Ah! spare him! (*assumes a tragic attitude*)

(Freeman (*to* r. *back of table*) *and* Sawyer (*to* l. *back of table*) *come in through the folding doors, which* Prosser *opens for them*)

Bunny. (*to* Hayter) Take care! If I hit you, I might hurt you. (*to* Hayter)

Freeman. Gentlemen! gentlemen! I beg——

Sawyer. (*stout, pale, pompous, with a bald head and black whiskers*) Whatever your private differences, this is not the place to settle them!

(HAYTER *drops his hands and turns.*)

FREEMAN. And a lady present—most improper! (*crosses* L. *to hatstand and disposes of hat then back to* R. *top end of table*)

HAYTER. (*wildly*) Improper! Ha, ha!

(PROSSER *pulls two chairs up to table. Enter* JAMES DARRELL.)

DARRELL. Ah, Hayter! old friend.

HAYTER. (*hastens to him, up* R.C., *and shakes hands in an agitated manner*) My dear Darrell!

BUNNY. (*crosses* L. *to* MRS. HAYTER) Cut home as fast as you can and burn my letters.

MRS. HAYTER. Serpent!

(*Exit* MRS. HAYTER, C.)

DARRELL. (*to* HAYTER) But what's the matter with you? You're not well.

HAYTER. (*gasping*) I've been upset. Your nephew——

DARRELL. Oh, he's very upsetting!

(HAYTER *takes* DARRELL *by the arm and turns him to* SAWYER *and* FREEMAN.)

HAYTER. Let me introduce you—your co-directors, Mr. Sawyer—Mr. Freeman!

SAWYER. (*to* DARRELL; *shakes hands with* DARRELL) Proud to make your acquaintance.

FREEMAN. A valued colleague. (*shakes hands with* DARRELL)

(*They form a little group* R. *of table.* Mrs. Duckett *is forcing her way in; down* L.)

Hayter. (*looking at* Mrs. Duckett) Who is this?

Sawyer. *More* ladies!

Hayter. (*muttering*) Another of his victims!

Mrs. Duckett. (*to* Bunny) He didn't explain a *thing!* (*looks scornfully at* Darrell)

Darrell. How could I explain when I knew nothing about it?

Bunny. (*distractedly, to* Mrs. Duckett) I can't attend to you now.

Hayter. (*authoritatively*) The Board room *must* be cleared.

(Hayter *crosses to* C. *chair at table, then* Freeman *goes to chair* R. *end of table.* Darrell *to chair* L. *of* Hayter, Sawyer *to chair* L. *end of table.*)

Bunny. This way, Mrs. Duckett! (*Leads her* R. *and up to office door,* R.) I'll see you as soon as the meeting is over. You wait in here—there's a good old soul! (*pats her shoulder*)

Mrs. Duckett. (*throwing off his hand indignantly*) Good old soul!

Bunny. Well, tiresome old soul, if you prefer it.

(*He gently pushes her into office* R., *and shuts the door on her.*)

Prosser, stand by the door.

(Hayter *is now standing at the head of the table. With a great effort he masters his excitement.*)

Hayter. (*Pompously*) Now, gentlemen, please! (*All sit. He takes the chair at the top of the table*) We must not allow our private differences to interfere with business.

(Bunny *crosses back of table to chair* L. *of* Hayter *and sits and picks up the Minute-book.*)

Bunny. (*in a shaky voice*) Shall I read the Minutes?

Hayter. No. Certainly not!

Bunny. I always read the Minutes. I can read them in a second.

Hayter. Do you hear what I say?

Bunny. I always read the Minutes.

Hayter. (*panting, rises*) With your permission, gentlemen, we'll take them as read.

Bunny. Then I don't read the Minutes.

Hayter. Something has occurred to upset me, and I must ask your indulgence. As our task today is purely formal, I trust you'll allow me to be brief.

Darrell. Hear, hear, Hayter! Put in your most eloquent style.

Hayter. Thank you, James, you are always in sympathy.

Bunny. No! He's generally in India!!

Hayter. Gentlemen, the flourishing condition of the Company justifies expansion.

Sawyer. Hear, hear!

Hayter. The increased output——

Bunny. Pūt, not pŭtt.

Hayter. I said *put.*

Bunny. You didn't. You said *putt.*

Darrell. I suppose he means putt-out. He must be referring to golf.

Hayter. —— of cement will necessitate an addition to the capital account——

Freeman. Hear, hear!

Hayter. Then I may move the resolution without further pre——

Bunny. Varication.

Hayter. I never prevaricate—pre—pre——

Darrell. Amble, Hayter, amble.

Hayter. Thank you, James,—preamble. I move from the chair, gentlemen, that a special general meeting of shareholders be called, to authorize the raising of the necessary capital by the issue of further shares to the amount of fifty thousand pounds.

Prosser. Hear! hear!

Hayter (*to* Bunny) Is that all in order?

Bunny. No.

Darrell. (*sharply*) Eh, what? Is that all right?

Bunny. Since you ask me, I should say it was all wrong. (Freeman *and* Sawyer *push back their chairs*)

Freeman. What's that?

Sawyer. What's he talking about?

BUNNY. I should suggest an alternative course—that this Company file a voluntary petition in bankruptcy.

HAYTER. Are you mad?

SAWYER. Do you dare to suggest that we are involvent?

(PROSSER, *amazed, comes forward from door* R. *Immediately it opens slightly and* MRS. DUCKETT'S *head appears She peeps in, and then withdraws her head.*)

BUNNY. The only sensible course——

FREEMAN. I protest.

BUNNY.—— is to file a petition. It is the only honest course, too, but that won't appeal to you. The whole thing is rotten—always has been rotten—*I* know it. (*pointing to* SAWYER *and* FREEMAN) *you* know it—and *you* know it. (*to* SAWYER) *You* hatched the scheme. (*to* FREEMAN) *You* got hold of old Hayter, fed him up with a lot of bunkum, and persuaded him to stand in. But what does he know about business? Not enough to stuff a lark!

SAWYER. (*solemnly*) This is libellous!

FREEMAN. Gentlemen, you are witnesses to this gross attack!

HAYTER. Will you allow your Chairman to be insulted?

(MRS. DUCKETT *enters door* R., *goes down* R. PROSSER *hustles her out of doors* C.)

Bunny. (*working himself up*) It would be highway robbery to ask for fresh capital now. In the old days, the robbers only took what they could carry —they didn't throw money into the ditch——

Hayter. This is intolerable!

(Mrs. Duckett *advances boldly.* Prosser *vainly tries to get her through doors again.*)

Bunny. (*getting more and more excited*) Besides, what do we know of this oily Greek, and his filthy cement. It has never stood any test.

Hayter. It has dammed the Nile. (Sawyer *rises and steps back*)

Bunny. Yes, and the blocks may burst at any moment. (*loudly and excitedly*) Then it would be dam the Nile in real earnest! And the Egyptian Government damning us—and we all damning one another! Whish! splosh!—and the cement goes back into the muck it's made of!

Mrs. Duckett. (*to* Bunny) Give me back my thirty-five pounds!

(Bunny *looks at her fixedly, and puts his hands up to his head.* Mrs. Duckett *hurriedly adjusts her bonnet*)

Bunny. (*turning to the others with a laugh*) There —she's heard it all. Now you can't hush it up! You'll *have* to file your petition. (*rise and go to front of table*)

MRS. DUCKETT. (*resolutely*) Or I'll file it *for* you!

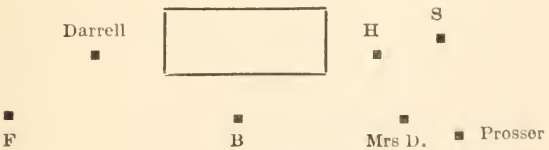
(*They all get up—pushing back their chairs and talking in great excitement and indignation.*)

HAYTER. Is the authority of the Chair to be defied? (*rise and go to* L. *of table*)

DARRELL. (*to* BUNNY) Now look here, young fellow, if I find you're wrong, this day's work will have cost you a hundred thousand pounds. (*rise and to* R. *of table*)

FREEMAN. You scoundrel! you've wrecked the Company! You'll have to answer to me for this. (*rise and go* R.)

SAWYER. Yes, and you'll have to answer *me* for libel in the Court of King's Bench.




HAYTER. (*hisses in* BUNNY'S *ear*) You'll have to answer *me* in the Divorce Court.

MRS. DUCKETT. You'll have to answer *me* in the dock of the Old Bailey!

BUNNY. (*shouting*) I'll answer you all—everything—everywhere. And my answer will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth (*He strikes a noble attitude*)

(*The others are awed for the moment by his words and gesture. Then* Bunny *drops his head and voice and sits on table*)—

Because I can't help myself!

CURTAIN.

## ACT III.

SCENE.—*The garden of* MRS. DARRELL'S *house at Hampstead. The scene represents a narrow grass lawn. At the back there is a high brick wall, with fruit-trees on it, and above the wall are seen trees in neighbouring gardens, and a patch of sky. On the right is a hedge with an opening to* DARRELL'S *house. Another path beneath the wall at the back leads to the lower part of the garden* L. *and is masked* (L.) *by the end of a high privet hedge. Above the hedge is seen the roof of a high summer house. Down* L. *there is a narrow flower border backed by trees and shrubs. By the lower end of this border is an old well, that is, the wooden cover of the well opening, set in brick-work, with a square coping, about six inches high. There are no uprights or windlass to the well. Between the well and the verandah is a plane tree, and under the tree are two wicker garden chairs, with red cushions, and a rustic table. On the table are some letters, and a folded newspaper.*

(BUNNY, *very dejected and woe-begone of aspect, is sitting in a wicker chair by the table. He leans his head on his right hand; he is reading a letter, which he holds in his left hand.*)

(Hammond *comes from the house* R. *and approaches him with a distant, yet determined air.*)

Hammond. (*to* L.C., *in tone of respectful resolution*) Please, sir, can I speak to you for a moment?

Bunny. (*sitting in chair* R. *of table, listlessly*) Yes. What is it, Hammond?

Hammond. If you please, sir, I wish to leave at the end of my month.

Bunny. You, too . . . why?

Hammond. I've nothing to say against the mistress, though I might have something to say about the living. In most houses the servants get butcher's meat for their breakfasts. But I say nothing of *that*——

Bunny. Thank you, Hammond.

Hammond. What I always say is, one can put up with a good deal where there's pleasant manners and pleasant words. I mean upstairs, of course.

Bunny. Go on. Let me know the worst.

Hammond. But when a gentleman who has always spoke and behaved *as* a gentleman, takes upon him to tell a respectable girl that her cap looks like an underdone pancake——

Bunny. (*groaning*) Did *I* say that?

Hammond. You did, sir. When I brought your tea.

Bunny. (*in exculpatory tones*) Well, you know, it *did* look like an underdone pancake. It always does. The only wonder is I've never said it before.

Hammond. And if you please, sir, cook wishes to leave at the end of *her* month.

Bunny. (*sitting up*) Ah! Not *Cook*?

Hammond. Yes, sir. Cook had meant to oblige you by stopping on after you was married. But not since you said her omelette tasted as if it had sat up all night——

Bunny. When did I say that?

Hammond. Last night at dinner, sir. Of course, cook couldn't think of stopping after those remarks had been passed in the dining-room.

Bunny. And I had thought that if the whole world deserted me, I could at least depend upon cook. (*frowning*)

Hammond. And the Tweeny——

Bunny. (*appealingly*) Ah! not the Tweeny. Don't tell me that the *Tweeny* is going?

Hammond. Yes, sir. Only this morning you met her on the stairs, and said you knew the chimneys wanted sweeping, but you didn't expect her to sweep 'em with her face——

Bunny. (*dropping his head on his hand*) The Tweeny! My last link with civilization!

Hammond. (*bridling*) So, as we none of us seem to be giving satisfaction, we hope you'll suit yourself at the end of the month. (*moves up to tree*)

Bunny. (*bitterly*) Suit myself! (*rises and crosses* L.) How easily she says it! If only one could suit oneself—and other people.

(Mrs. Darrell *approaches from the house* R.)

Mrs. Darrell. (*to* c.) Hammond, go to Miss Creighton, and ask if she wants any help in her packing.

Hammond. Yes, m'm.

(Exit Hammond *into house.*)

(*It is at once apparent that the relations between* Bunny *and his mother are strained.*)

Bunny. (*nervously, yet trying to appear at ease*) Looks like a change in the weather, doesn't it, mother? Quite thundery over there. (*points up* L.)

Mrs. Darrell. (*coldly*) I didn't come out to talk about the weather.

Bunny. (*crushed*) But I like talking about the weather. It can't give one notice—whatever one says about it.

Mrs. Darrell. (*seriously*) I wanted to tell you that Norah is coming out to say good-bye to you directly.

Bunny. (*mournfully*) Yes, mother.

Mrs. Darrell. (*sternly*) As you know, I think you have behaved abominably to that poor girl.

Bunny. (*submissively*) Yes, mother, I think so too.

Mrs. Darrell. (c., *getting declamatory*) Her parents are old friends of mine. I ask their child to stay in my house; you deliberately win her young affections; and all the time you are making love to a

married woman. You hadn't even the sense to keep your flirtation private——

Bunny. I never expected to feel so like the villain of a melodrama. (*sits on well*, L.)

Mrs. Darrell. If you're heartless enough to take it all as joke——

Bunny. A joke! Mother, a joke!! (*points to the well-cover*) I suppose there's not enough water in this old well to drown anybody. Because if there were——

Mrs. Darrell. (*with a gesture of angry impatience, turning as if to go*) If you cannot be serious—even for a moment——

Bunny. But I *am* serious. *Dead* serious.

Mrs. Darrell. I am very much displeased with you, Bunny. And I have come to the conclusion——

(*pauses to give weight and emphasis to announcement*)

Bunny. (*anxiously*) Yes, mother?

Mrs. Darrell. That it will be better for us to part.

Bunny. Part! Oh, mother! (*crosses* R. *and sits chair* L. *of table*) But I might have been prepared for anything—after the Tweeny.

Mrs. Darrell. (*coldly*) You no longer seem to appreciate my housekeeping. You upset the servants. And you have taken to making personal remarks—a habit that is most ill-bred—and—and—disconcerting.

Bunny. (*murmurs apologetically*) It's quite unintentional.

Mrs. Darrell. You said this morning at breakfast that the noise I made in crackling toast got on your nerves.

Bunny. It must have been envy—sheer envy. I never can make so much noise myself. One can't with one's *own* teeth, you know.

Mrs. Darrell. (*deeply insulted*) Bunny!

Bunny. (*trying to cover his slip*) If you knew how fully I realize that I might have had so many *worse* mothers—I mean there are so many elderly women I simply couldn't have stood as mothers. You might have worn a gilt wig and faked eyebrows, or you might have been a dog-fancier and bred Japanese pugs, or you might——

Mrs. Darrell. (*cutting him short*) That will do——I would have stayed with you—even at a considerable personal sacrifice, if you had seemed to appreciate my devotion. But now I feel no scruples about going away to live my own life.

Bunny. (*startled*) Eh?

Mrs. Darrell. For the first time in fifty-nine years I shall be able to live as I like, without consulting the tastes of a selfish father, a selfish husband, or a selfish son.

Bunny. (*plaintively*) I always thought you *liked* living with me. I thought you liked housekeeping, and self-sacrifice—and all that.

Mrs. Darrell. (*grimly*) Oh, did you?

Bunny. I thought my pleasant ways and lively chatter made up for everything.

Mrs. Darrell. You bestowed most of your lively chatter on out-siders. (*she turns towards the house*) Here comes Norah. Poor, ill-used child! I little thought when I invited her to this house—— (Bunny *crosses* L.)

(Norah *comes out of the house, and approaches the table. She looks pale and sad.*)

Norah. I shall soon be going, Bunny. I didn't like to leave without bidding you good-bye.

Bunny. (*dejectedly*) It's very good of you. It's much more than I deserve.

Mrs. Darrell. (*tartly*) I quite agree with you.

(*Exit* Mrs. Darrell *into the house.*)

Norah. I don't suppose we shall ever meet again.

Bunny. (*with a sigh*) No; soon I expect I shall be quite alone. (*crosses* C.)

Norah. But I wish you all success and happiness.

Bunny. Thank you, dear. I have a letter here from Dodd & Gardiner, severing our connexion. The Cement Company is to be wound up, and I have seven or eight actions pending against me. I expect to pass the remainder of my days between the Hampstead Union and Holloway. (*turns away* L.)

Norah. Oh! I'm sorry!

Bunny. (*with pathos, turns to her*) When next you drive along the Embankment, you'll probably see me sleeping on a bench. I shall be unshaven, my feet will be through my boots, and my tattered clothes will hang loosely on my shrunken form. (*turns from her*) You've had a very lucky escape, dear.

Norah. (*moved*) Oh, don't! (*down* R.) It isn't *that*. If I thought you loved me, I shouldn't care if you were an outcast or a felon. I'd start housekeeping on a bench on the Embankment, and think it fun. If only it were possible! (*down* L.)

Bunny. If only it were possible!! (*timidly* I suppose nothing would ever induce you to believe I really do *care*? (*crosses* R.C.)

Norah. I wish I could. But after what you said yesterday——

Bunny. I said I loved you yesterday.

Bunny. Yes, but you said you loved *her* too.

Bunny. That was the day before.

Norah. How can I tell which is true?

Bunny. (*earnestly*) When I say, "I love you," can't you hear it in my voice?—can't you see it in my eyes?

Norah. (*turning away*) I daren't look—I daren't listen.

Bunny. (*humbly*) But I dare say you are right to give me up. I know I'm not good enough for you. (*crosses* L.C.)

Norah. That wouldn't make any difference.

(*crosses* L.) One loves a man for what he *is*, not for what he's got, or what he's done.

BUNNY. Nobody's loving me just now for anything.

NORAH. (*turns her back to him*) There's one thing you might do for my sake, Bunny—the last thing I shall ever ask of you.

BUNNY. (*eagerly*) Anything—everything!

NORAH. (*slowly*) If you meet another girl—as stupid as me—don't teach her to—to dream silly dreams. It takes so little to set us dreaming, and when we wake up, it—*hurts*.

BUNNY. (*going to her, and speaking in pleading tones*) Norah—my little girl!

(NORAH *turns, and for the moment appears to be relenting, when* MRS. HAYTER *comes out through hedge.* MRS. HAYTER *comes swiftly down to the table. She looks anxious and agitated.*)

NORAH. (*in consternation*) Mrs. Hayter! (*glances at* BUNNY, *who goes up*)

MRS. HAYTER. (*rapidly*) Bunny, I must speak to you. Oh, I know you'll think it's extraordinary—my coming here—after all that's passed. But it's urgent——(BUNNY *comes down* R.C.)

(NORAH *begins to move away.*)

It may concern you too, Miss Creighton. Don't refuse me a hearing. It's most serious——

Norah. (*coldly*) For you, perhaps. I don't see how it concerns me. (*goes up* c.)

Mrs. Hayter. (*rather breathless*) But you *will*. Only wait. Bunny, yesterday my husband went to his solicitors——

Bunny. (*picking up a letter*) I know. I heard from them this morning.

Mrs. Hayter. Then he went to an hotel, and—(*with a gasp*) and sent for his *things*. That showed me he was in dead earnest. (*crosses* L.) I didn't close my eyes all last night.

Norah. Nor did I.

Bunny. (*crosses* R.) Nor did I.

Mrs. Hayter. (*with an effort*) I—I thought of what you said to me yesterday. Oh, I was furious with you—*furious*. I hated you so, that I was ready to ruin myself, if only I could ruin you too. But on reflection——

Bunny. (R., *looking up*) Yes?

Mrs. Hayter. (*with a gulp*) I—I realized that there were some grains of truth in the odious things you said.

Bunny. Grains? Great big stacks!!

Mrs. Hayter. You were right about Coventry. I couldn't live in Coventry on twopence a year.

Bunny. There wouldn't even be twopence now.

Mrs. Hayter. (*crosses* R. *to* Bunny) So this divorce must be stopped.

Bunny. That's all very well. But how?

Mrs. Hayter. I went to see my husband this

morning—at Hatchett's. We had a long talk. I tried to persuade him that he would only make himself ridiculous if he went into Court——

Bunny. He doesn't need to go into Court for *that*.

Mrs. Hayter. At last I got him to promise that he would come and see you, and talk things over dispassionately before taking further proceedings. He may be here at any moment.

Bunny. (*startled*) Here! (*crosses* L.) But I don't want to see him.

Mrs. Hayter. Yes. (*crosses* L. *to* Bunny) I rushed on ahead to tell you. He's going to cross-examine you.

Bunny. But I don't want to be cross-examined!

Norah. All this has nothing to do with me. I must go and finish my packing.

Mrs. Hayter. (*eagerly, crosses* C. *to* Norah) But you can help us if you will. If Bunny could tell my husband that he's still engaged to you.

Norah. (*decidedly*) Oh, no. I couldn't do that.

Mrs. Hayter. (*pleadingly*) You need only pretend.

Bunny. We're not very good at pretending just now.

Mrs. Hayter. And poor Bunny is really fond of you. You might stand by him now.

Norah. Stand by *you*, you mean. No, that's asking too much.

Bunny. Yes, that's asking too much.

Mrs. Hayter. (*to* Norah) If you'd only let me have a little talk with you alone. I'm sure I could put things in a better light. I'm really awfully sorry . . .

Norah. You mean you're really awfully frightened. (*relenting a little*) But I don't mind hearing what you've got to say for yourself. *I'm* not a *cat*. I've been to a public school and learnt cricket. Of course it was different when *you* were a girl.

Mrs. Hayter. (*winces, but keeps her temper*) May I come up to your room ?

Norah. No, come into the summer-house. (*crosses* L. *front of* Mrs. Hayter *and exit into summer-house.*)

Mrs. Hayter. Yes. (*to* Bunny) If my husband comes, I'll wait there till he's gone. He mustn't know I've been here.

(*She follows* Norah *down the path behind the privet hedge.*)

Bunny. (*addressing her back*) That's all very well, but if he asks me I'm sure to tell him.

(*Enter* Hammond *with a telegram.*)

Hammond. (*to* L.C., *austerely*) A telegram for you, sir.

Bunny. You are looking a little off colour, Hammond.

Hammond. The boy is waiting to know if there's an answer.

BUNNY. (*opens telegram*) No, there's no answer. Tell Mrs. Darrell that Uncle James will be here to lunch.

HAMMOND. (*bristling*) And cook wished to know if you'd any orders for your luncheon.

BUNNY. (*sighing*) No—I've no appetite.

HAMMOND. Cook's message was, if you wanted anything different from her usual method of cooking, would you kindly explain it?

BUNNY. Well, as to her usual method— (*breaks off with an effort*) No! we won't go into that. . . . (*with forced cheerfulness*)

(HAMMOND *stares stonily at him.*)

HAMMOND. (*severely*) Very good, sir. (*goes up* R.C.)

HAYTER. (*voice heard outside,* R.) In the garden, very good.

BUNNY. (*turning up his eyes*) Heavens! Old Hayter! Beelzebub, come to my aid!

(HAYTER *enters. He bows stiffly.*

(*Exit.* HAMMOND.)

HAYTER. (*in solemn tones*) Mr. Darrell, I want to have a little serious conversation with you.

BUNNY. (*wearily; crosses* R. *and sits in chair* R. *of table*) Everybody seems to want a serious conversation with me this morning. Sit down.

HAYTER. Thank you. You have heard from my solicitors? (*sits in chair* L. *of table*)

Bunny. (*picking up letter*) Yes, yours—among others. You'll find it there somewhere. They all begin the same way. "Sir, unless."

Hayter. Since I instructed them, I have had time for reconsideration. I passed a sleepless night.

Bunny. So did I.

Hayter. I couldn't help admitting to myself that there might be a fragment of truth in the accusations you brought against me.

Bunny. Fragment!—Coliseum!——

Hayter. I mean about my having neglected my wife. Of course, nothing can excuse her conduct if my worst suspicions are correct, but she assures me that she is technically innocent.

Bunny. (*eagerly*) We both are.

Hayter. (*coldly*) I'm not interested in *your* innocence—technical or otherwise. But if there has been nothing worse than indiscretion, I feel that she can plead extenuating circumstances. I realize that nothing could make up to my wife for the loss of my society. (*looks at* Bunny *for confirmation*)

Bunny. Really!! Now, I should have said—— (*checks himself*)

Hayter. Yes. You would have said?

Bunny. No, no. I won't say it—I'll think it.

Hayter. Now, I am about to put one or two searching questions to you. I hope you'll be perfectly frank with me.

BUNNY. (*with a groan*) I think I can promise you that.

HAYTER. You admit that you made violent love to my wife no later than the day before yesterday.

BUNNY. Yes, I admit that—but without prejudice.

HAYTER. Now I put it to you—— (*stops short suddenly, and stares*) What's that?

BUNNY. (*starting*) What? Where?

HAYTER. That ring. How did you get it?

BUNNY. (*sulkily*) I didn't steal it, I shouldn't be wearing it now if I could get the beastly thing off.

HAYTER. (*excitedly*) But it's very curious—very rare. I've only seen one like it before. (*takes* BUNNY'S *hand and examines the ring*) Yes, this is an ancient religious ring.

BUNNY. (*with awakening interest*) My uncle picked it up in India for a few rice—or pice. He said it was a priest's ring—something to do with the goddess——

HAYTER. The goddess Onagra. Yes, here's the tongue, and the Bhutani inscription.

BUNNY. You can't read it, I suppose?

HAYTER. (*proudly*) I'm one of the very few Englishmen who can read the Bhutani dialect.

BUNNY. What does it say?

HAYTER. It means, literally——"Listen, O tribes, to the voice of Onagra."

BUNNY. (*disappointed*) What did she talk about?

HAYTER. There's an ancient manuscript called

"The Sayings of Onagra." This inscription probably alludes to the best-known saying, which has passed into a proverb. It runs: "There are two things which are terrible in the eyes of men—a naked sword and the naked truth." But Onagra added, "Handle them boldly, and ye need fear no evil."

Bunny. (*mutters*) Onagra didn't know everything.

Hayter. The natives imagine that these rings have some magic power. That's nonsense, of course. But there's no doubt that they exercise a curious influence on the wearer.

Bunny. (*opening his eyes*) What sort of influence?

Hayter. The pressure of the ring on the finger seems to affect certain nerve-centres or brain-cells.

Bunny. I *said* it was a brain-storm.

Hayter. It has been attributed to some subtle form of poison, or it may be impregnated with a certain property—or active agent.

Bunny. (*with eager interest*) Yes, yes—but what does it *do*?

Hayter. Well, the effect is very remarkable—some flaw seems to be caused in the connexion between the brain and the tongue.

Bunny. Yes?

Hayter. The wearer of the ring seems unable to *cook* his ideas. He is compelled to give them forth in the raw, and his friends naturally find them indigestible. The result is often most distressing.

BUNNY. (*bitterly*) Distressing! It's damnable! If I could only get it off. I must have it filed.

HAYTER. Filed, no, don't do that. Vandalism! It works with a secret spring, no doubt. (*takes microscope from his pocket*) I might be able to find the spring with my microscope.

(BUNNY *stretches out his hand*)

No!! On second thoughts, I think I should like to put my questions *before* I take off the ring. Were you wearing it yesterday?

BUNNY. (*with conviction*) I should rather think I was.

HAYTER. I didn't notice it. Too agitated, I suppose. . . . Now I am anxious to know how far this—so-called—flirtation with my wife really went. You have seen a good deal of her the last year or two—have been much alone with her.

BUNNY. Yes, while you were gadding about to scientific conversaziones.

HAYTER. (*solemnly*) I admit my own misconduct.

BUNNY. (*opening his eyes*) What?

HAYTER. I mean my own neglect!! Er—when you were alone with my wife, did you ever—(*flickers his eyelids uncomfortably*) did you ever squeeze her hand?

BUNNY. (*candidly*) Yes, I may have done so. But with me that doesn't mean anything at all. It's only a matter of habit.

HAYTER. (*frowns thoughtfully*) You never

squeezed *my* hand. (*bashfully*) Have you ever—this is very painful for me—ever put your arm round her waist?

Bunny. (*after due consideration*) I *may* have put it along the back of her chair, and it *may* have fallen off. You know how slippery your chair-backs are, like glass.

Hayter. (*worried*) *I* never found them slippery. . . . There is another and still more unpleasant question, I'm afraid I must put. Have you ever kissed her?

Bunny. Won't you try and find the little spring?

Hayter. Have you ever kissed her?

Bunny. (*hesitates*) Once. The day her little dog died. You remember Floss?

Hayter. I should think I do. Little beast! Was it without her consent?

Bunny. (*considering*) I don't think she knew I was going to.

Hayter. Where did you kiss her?

Bunny. On the staircase.

Hayter. (*with a gesture of impatience*) No, no, no. You know I don't mean that. I mean was it on her cheek or——

Bunny. On her ear.

Hayter. Her ear?

Bunny. Yes; she turned away her head when she saw it coming and I bungled it. (*naïvely*) It wasn't *like* me—to bungle it.

Hayter. Was she angry?

BUNNY. Because I bungled it?

HAYTER. Was she angry?

BUNNY. She *appeared* to be at the time. She said she'd never see me or speak to me again.

HAYTER. (*bitterly*) She didn't keep her word.

BUNNY. You see it was the day of Flossie's funeral. I'd made all the arrangements. I wrote the epitaph. We buried her in Kensington Gardens, and put up a little tombstone.

HAYTER. I know, I know. . . . And that was all?

BUNNY. Well, if the poor little beast had been a baby we couldn't have done much more.

HAYTER. I mean, was that all that passed between you and my wife?

BUNNY. Yes, all—of any consequence.

HAYTER. (*frowning*) Any consequence? I wonder what you mean by that?

BUNNY. I mean of any consequence!

HAYTER. (*getting confused*) Then I may take it that when you told me yesterday your relations with my wife were platonic in their nature——

BUNNY. I was doing the George Washington act.

HAYTER. In the circumstances, I am bound to believe you. The somewhat indiscreet flirtation of my wife was no doubt the result of pique and jealousy.

BUNNY. (*annoyed*) Oh, you think——

HAYTER. (*fatuously*) I don't think, I *know*. (*rises and goes* L.) And knowing all, I can forgive all. Poor little woman! I must try and interest her in my pursuits. I shall insist on her attending my

lectures, and persuade her to read my book on the Love-literature of the Orient.

(*Enter* Hammond, *followed by* James Darrell.)

Hammond. Mr. Darrell.

Mr. Darrell. Morning, Bunny! Morning, Hayter! (*takes his hat off and mops his forehead*) Phew! What an atmosphere. I've been hard at it since 7 a.m. (*to* Bunny) I've fairly tackled the books of that blessed Company, and I find you were entirely justified in what you said yesterday.

Hayter. What's that?

Mr. Darrell. (*to* Hayter) Of course *you'd* no idea what a mess they'd got into. You were only a figure-head.

Mr. Hayter. Figure-head!

Mr. Darrell. There's only one sensible, honest thing to do, and that is what Bunny proposed—wind it up.

Bunny. I'm glad somebody thinks me right about something. That will be my only comfort—now that I'm ruined for life.

Mr. Darrell. Ruined for life! Pooh! What are you talking about?

Bunny. (*taking up letter*) Dodd & Gardiner wish to close our connexion. Mr. Sawyer threatens me with an action for libel, Mrs. Duckett charges me with fraudulent misrepresentation, and——

Hayter. Dear! dear!

Mr. Darrell. (*with a scornful laugh*) Dodd & Gardiner aren't everybody. . . . I thought it better

to stop Mrs. Duckett's mouth, so I sent her a cheque for her ridiculous thirty-five pounds. Then I found out one or two interesting little facts about Mr. Sawyer. I don't think you'll be troubled with *him* again.

Bunny. (*gazing at him*) A fairy godfather after all! Uncle James, I maligned you yesterday when I said you were a disgrace to the profession.

Mr. Darrell. (*grunts*) You did rile me a bit. . . . But when I saw you stand up against the Board, and hurl the truth at them, though you knew it spelt disaster to yourself, I was proud of you, my boy, devilish proud of you.

(Hayter *coughs significantly.*)

Bunny. (*beaming*) I can't remember anybody ever having been proud of me before.

Mr. Darrell. Now, I've a plan to propose. Why not set up for yourself as a full-fledged member of the Stock Exchange?

Bunny. But the expense?

Mr. Darrell. (*genially*) I'll pay your entrance-fee and subscription, and find your sureties.

Bunny. Oh, Uncle James! (Hammond *shows on* Madame Favre *and* Teddy Lestrange.)

Rosalie. Ah, Monsieur Bunny, Norah telephoned to say you are in very great trouble. But tell me——

Lestrange. Yes, we heard you'd landed with your face in the gravel.

Bunny. (*joyfully*) No, no, it's all right. I've just made a great discovery.

Rosalie. (*glancing at* Teddy) Ah, and we too—we have made a discovery.

Lestrange. Rather! Beats the North Pole all to nothing.

Rosalie. But, Monsieur Bunny, you tell us yours, because ours—well, that is still our secret.

Bunny. I must call Norah and mother to hear the great news. (*hesitates*) Mr. Hayter, your wife is in that summer-house.

Hayter. (*starts*) My wife—here!

Bunny. (*aside to him*) She only came to ask me to put matters before you in the (*swallows*) the most favourable light. She is most *anxious* to be reconciled to you.

Hayter. (*complacently*) Poor little Melisande! How that woman adores me!

Bunny. (*rapidly*) And now she's trying to patch it up between Norah and me. (*goes a few steps down path* L., *and calls*) Norah! Mrs. Hayter!

(Norah *and* Mrs. Hayter *appear round privet hedge. Both look surprised, and rather alarmed.*)

Bunny. (*to* Norah) It's all right, darling. We've just made a great discovery.

Hayter. (*encouragingly to his wife*) Don't be alarmed, dearest. Everything is explained.

(Mrs. Darrell *comes out of house, and stops short on seeing* Mrs. Hayter.)

Mrs. Darrell. (*very coldly*) Mrs. Hayter! To what do I owe this——

Mrs. Hayter. (*apologetically*) I know it must seem extraordinary.

Bunny. (*taking command of the situation*) Now, mother, don't get your frills up. Nobody is to blame for anything—not even me. It's all the fault of the ring.

Norah. The ring!

Mrs. Hayter. What ring?

Bunny. (*breathlessly*) This old rascal. (*touches ring*) It's poisoned, or chockful of mysterious power, and when you wear it you can't *edit* your ideas—you're bound to speak the plain, unvarnished truth.

Mrs. Darrell. My dear boy, you take my breath away. What *are* you talking about?

Bunny. It's all the ring, mother—the old blackguard of a ring. (*pointing to* Hayter) Ask him, he knows all about it!

Mrs. Darrell. (*turning to* Hayter) But what an amazing story!

Mr. Darrell. The natives said it was bewitched. (*They talk, while* Bunny *turns to* Norah.)

Bunny. You see it wasn't *my* fault, darling. I was only a victim.

Norah. (*slowly*) Of course, I should *like* to believe it. But are you sure about the ring? Would it have the same effect on everybody?

Bunny. (*gaily*) Of course it would. Who's got a file?

Hayter. No, no, I'll find the spring. (*examines it through his glass*) Yes, here it is. You press it on this side. There—— (*takes ring off.* Bunny *stretches himself, and sighs as though relieved of an incubus.* Hayter *goes up to* Mrs. Hayter.)

Bunny. (*holding up ring*) I don't want to be selfish—I'll give you all a chance. Teddy, will you have the first go?

Lestrange. Oh, I don't mind. I've nothing to conceal. (*crosses* c.)

Bunny. (*to* Rosalie) We've got to hear your secret, you know.

Rosalie. Oh, it is nothing. But you gave Teddy some advice yesterday, and—well, he has taken it.

(*Smiles at* Teddy, *who has put on ring.*)

Lestrange. (*suddenly, as though started by machinery*) Talking of rings, the last time I was engaged, I bought such a ripping little ring—diamonds and sapphires; it's done duty five times since then.

Rosalie. Five times!

Lestrange. Yes, but it's getting rather thin, so I shall have to buy a new one for the sixth. (*suddenly becomes aware of what he is saying, and holds out his finger to* Bunny *in alarm*) Take it off—take it off!

Bunny. (*laughs*) Nothing to conceal, eh? (*takes off ring.* Teddy *goes* r.) Mother, would you like to try on this funny old ring?

Mrs. Darrell. At *my* age! Certainly *not*. (*waving it away*)

Bunny. Can't I tempt anybody else? Uncle James—— (Darrell *waves it away*) Mr. Hayter? (Hayter *waves it away*) Norah, you're not afraid?

Norah. (*crosses* c. *takes ring and looks at it distrustfully*) They say love is blind. Perhaps it ought to be deaf and dumb too.

Lestrange. Wear it once a year, as a kind of spring cleaning.

Mrs. Hayter. No, it's a poisonous thing. Throw it away.

Hayter. I protest!

Bunny. There's a disused well here. I had some thought of throwing myself down it this morning. (*lifts the wooden cover, which works on hinges. At this point the sky should seem to become overcast, as though a storm were brewing. To* Norah) Will you throw the ring down instead?

Norah. (*holds up ring, as though deliberating*) Shall I——?

Bunny. (*slily*) Or shall I put it on again? (*holds out his hand*)

Norah. (*with a quick movement crosses to well*) No! (*drops ring down well*) So much for Onagra!

(*Immediately the ring drops there is a low peal of thunder. The lid of the well falls to with a bang.*)

Mrs. Darrell. There's a storm blowing up.

Hayter. (*to* Darrell) That's rather remarkable.

Darrell. What's remarkable?

Hayter. You know the ring of Onagra is symbolized as thunder. (*They go up together* L. *There is another low peal of thunder.*)

Bunny. (*takes* Norah's *engagement ring from his pocket and goes to her*) You wouldn't wear the other, but will you wear this again?

Norah. Yes. (*holds out her finger*, Bunny *puts on the ring*)

Norah. Bunny, dear, though Onagra's ring is at the bottom of the well, don't you think we might still speak the truth to each other—as long as it isn't *unkind*?

Bunny. (*seriously*) Yes, and I'm going to speak the truth to you now.

Norah. (*shrinking*) Oh, what?

Bunny. (*very tenderly and sincerely*) Darling, I love you! (*with joyous emphasis*) And that's "The Naked Truth."

(*Kisses her. A sudden gleam of sunshine breaks out and illumines the couple at the well.*)

Curtain.

*Printed in Great Britain by* Butler & Tanner, *Frome and London*

*YOU SHOULD READ*

# HOLED OUT IN ONE

## AN IDEAL ONE ACT PLAY FOR AMATEURS

BY

## CLAUDE RADCLIFFE

---

There are two male and three female characters.

---

The piece plays for from three quarters to an entire hour, and is funny, without being either silly or vulgar, from the commencement to the end.

---

**Copies, One Shilling Net Each.**

The acting fee for Amateurs is Thirty Shillings each and every representation.

---

SAMUEL FRENCH, LIMITED,
26 Southampton Street, Strand,
LONDON, W.C.2

*The following plays by Hubert Henry Davies are published at two shillings net :—*

MRS. GORRINGE'S NECKLACE.

THE MOLLUSC.

COUSIN KATE.

A SINGLE MAN.

LADY EPPING'S LAWSUIT.

---

*Obtainable from*

*SAMUEL FRENCH, LIMITED.*

412